


SIGHT & SOUND

A black and white photograph of a large, abstract sculpture made of a grid of rods, with a thick plume of smoke or steam rising from it. The sculpture is composed of a complex network of intersecting lines, creating a mesh-like structure. A large, billowing cloud of smoke or steam rises from the top of the sculpture, partially obscuring the sky. The overall composition is dramatic and industrial.

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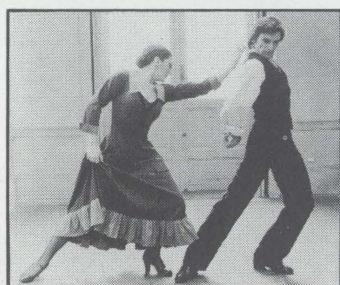
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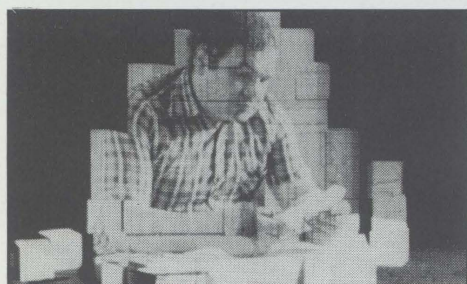


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Editor
Penelope Houston
Associate Editor
John Pym
Designer
Gillian Crampton Smith
Publications Manager
John Smoker

On the cover:
end of the dragon
in Jacques Rivette's
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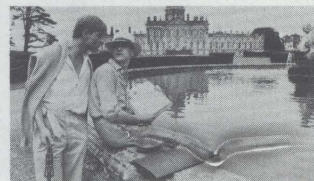
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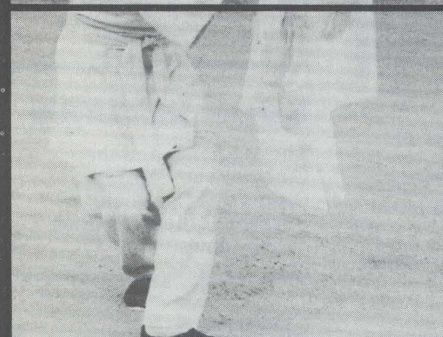
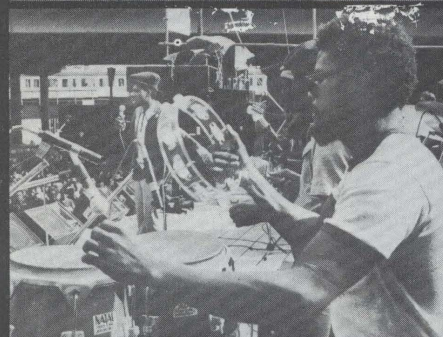
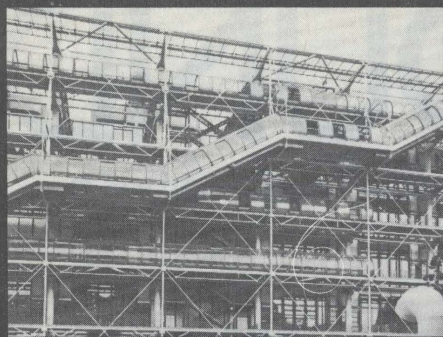
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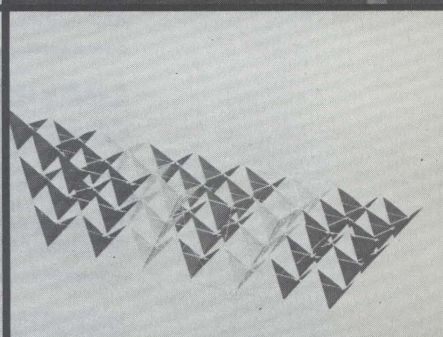
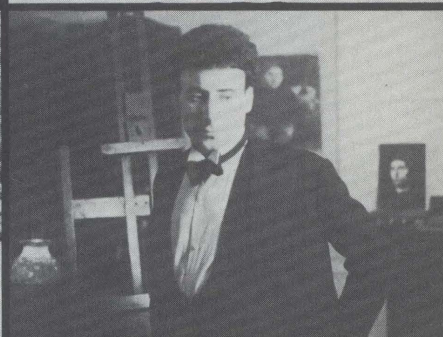
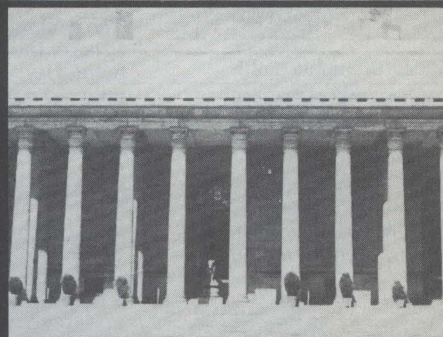
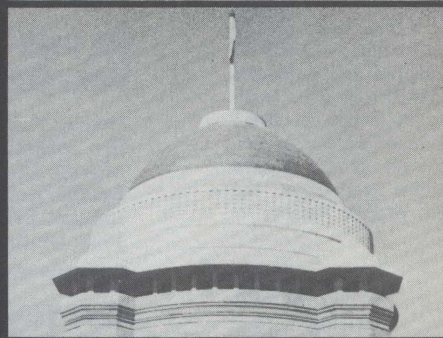
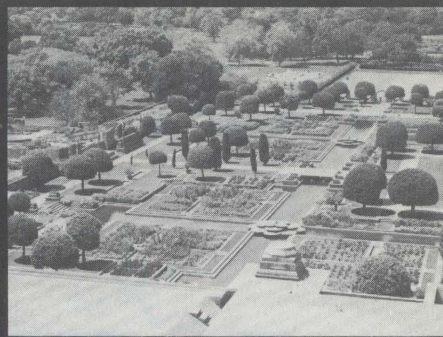
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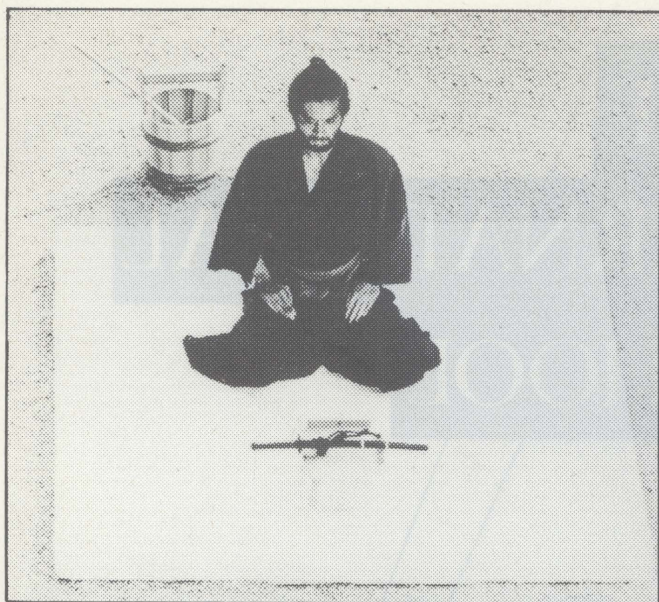
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Japanese Films of the Edo Period (January)



Inside! (February)

SEASONS

at the
National Film
Theatre

*Leslie Howard
(January)*

January

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IN THE PICTURE

Stretch and squash

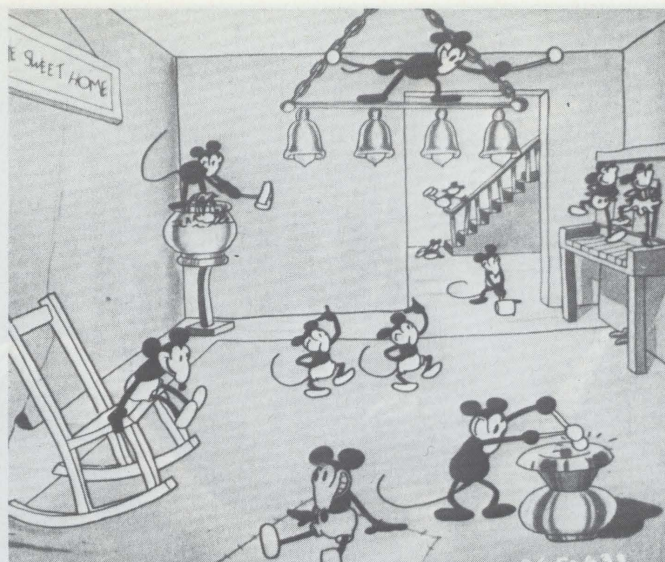
Articulate rodents at the Whitney Museum

New York's Whitney Museum, customarily the home of the American avant-garde, devoted itself throughout the summer of 1981 to articulate rodents and children of all ages. In the exhibition 'Disney Animations and Animators', the curators John Hanhardt and Greg Ford showcased the work of Disney studio artists from the 20s, when the Mouse was in his infancy, to 1942, when something like assembly line technology was responsible for a deceptively spontaneous tide of shorts and features.

This was the first large-scale occasion on which the public could judge how the work of individual artists, separately displayed and identified, locked into the Disney-dominated studio/factory system, and how a Disney character developed, from preliminary sketches, through animation roughs and cleaned-up drawings to the glowing camera-ready inked-and-painted celluloid. Many drawings were grouped in sequence, demonstrating the techniques for approximating movement—'stretch and squash', 'overlapping actions' and other subtleties of perspective and weight—from the studio's early 'rubber hose' style to the fluid credibility of the late 30s. Drawing sequences were sometimes next to video units displaying slow-motion pencil tests and the final cinematic results. The latter, in remarkably accurate colour and sharp definition, proved that Disney's imagery is as effective in today's video as in 30s Technicolor.

Although the work of the design and background artists was not so meticulously documented, one could observe too how paintings by artists like Gustaf Tenggren keyed the total look of films such as *Little Hiawatha*, represented by a panoramic forest background, *Snow White* and *Pinocchio*, and how the often bizarre 'inspiration' sketches of the prolific Albert Hurter were worked into the carefully rendered backgrounds of such Silly Symphonies as *Music Land*.

The exhibition's climax, a section on the work of the 'Nine Old Men' and other key animators who contributed most to the Disney output, proved that, while certain animators were 'cast' in roles which best suited them (Freddy Moore, for example, specialised in female characters), most commanded a wide range of skills. Frank Thomas' ability to animate 'sincere' characters such as Pinocchio contributed much to his portrait of the devious Captain Hook, while Bill Tytla's feel for massive inarticulate villains



Early Disney: 'While the Cat's Away' (1929).

such as Stromboli and Tchernobog enabled him to render the touching muteness of Dumbo. The detailed sketches in this section of *Monstro* the whale and some of *Fantasia*'s dinosaurs, skilfully shaded to give a vivid impression of volume and weight, brought to mind Frank Lloyd Wright's perceptive suggestion that Disney forgo the inking and painting process and simply photograph the original pencil sketches. Wright felt that in the ensuing steps the sense of spontaneity and motion inherent in the original drawings was dissipated.

The exhibition was completed by a series of film programmes, and one subject explored in these was the development of individual and ensemble personality animation, from the solo 'star turns' in such shorts as *Wise Little Hen* (1934) and the sublimely synchronised Mickey-Donald-Pluto-Clara Cluck quartet in *Mickey's Grand Opera* (1936), to the effortless, almost throwaway ensemble 'acting' in the *The Adventures of Mr Toad* (1949). A 'Human Movement' programme traced the difficult evolution of the naturalised style of human animation which Disney rightly felt to be a prerequisite for his move into full-scale feature production: from the rubbery energy of parodied nursery rhyme characters in *Mother Goose Melodies* (1931), through transitional attempts at more natural movement in *The Pied Piper* (1933) and *The Goddess of Spring* (1934), to the fluid jitterbugging of the 'All the Cats Join In' sequence of *Make Mine Music* (1946).

Among such rarities as 'Oswald the Rabbit' and 'Alice in Cartoonland' instalments from the 20s was an excerpt from MGM's *Hollywood Party*, a 1934 musical revue feature, in which Mickey appears at a party hosted by Jimmy Durante. Still possessed of a spunky mania for mischief, which was

dissipated in later years, the Mouse pulls his snout into a parody of the Durante profile. He is then induced to play on a grand piano, plucked from mid-air, 'Hot Chocolate Soldiers' by MGM's Nacio Herb Brown and Arthur Freed. Orchestra, chorus and Technicolor gradually take over and an elaborately choreographed Silly Symphony unfolds. The sequence ends with the mutilated soldiers, unheeded of Freed's cautionary lyrics, victoriously parading through Chocolate Town, only to be melted by the sun into chocolate puddles.

ROSS CARE

Saint Cinema

Sinners, but not many stars, came marching in at San Sebastian

From a distance, the splendid façade of San Sebastian's festival palace, the Teatro Victoria Eugenia, seemed to be illuminated by flickering devotional candles. All that glitters at a film festival, of course, is not true devotion, and on closer inspection they proved to be an electrical effect. But if the candles weren't real, the huge effigy that dominates the city's skyline certainly seemed to be, and prompted thoughts about the religious subtext of any occasion of pomp and ceremony in a Catholic country. And San Sebastian went in for display in a way which suggested that it was not going to concede anything to Cannes. Guards of honour in national costume played one-handed Basque flutes (though their saluting arch would change surrealistically from swords to paddles); more fancifully attired dancers sported large silver candelabras on their heads; and guests swept up a red carpet watched by crowds who didn't seem to mind that tuxedoed local dignitaries were standing in for actual movie stars.

The opening night film, *True Confessions* (reviewed elsewhere in this issue), had its obvious Catholic relevance. But in this context it might also have been selected with a sly sense of wit. After all, it deals—from the credits sequence of Robert De Niro presiding over an elaborate wedding ritual to the ending in a graveyard where desert winds blow—with the Church's worldly panoply being overturned by its spiritual imperatives. There even seemed to be an implicit rebuke in the film's dry, fastidious manner: writers John Gregory Dunne and Joan Didion might have been equating the excesses of Mother Church with those of the commercial cinema. Not exactly a crowd pleaser, even in its ribaldry, the film undoubtedly got a bigger response in San Sebastian than it will from Anglo-Saxon audiences to lines such as Robert Duvall's put-down to an interfering nursing sister, 'May all your sons be Jesuits.'

An appropriate companion piece to this might have been *Reborn*, an intriguing-sounding project about a revivalist preacher with Dennis Hopper, but unfortunately shown late in the main festival. What stretched in between in the competition was a lot of reflected glory—films recently from Cannes (*Man of Iron*) or Venice (Ferreri's *Tales of Ordinary Madness*)—and one significant hole, a new Fassbinder, *Lola*, which didn't turn up. But in the absence of their leader, the Fassbinder team did their best, with an entry in the new directors section called *Wo geht's denn hier zum Film?*, directed by Peer Raben and starring Peter Kern, Kurt Raab, Ingrid Caven and (too briefly) Irm Hermann. A comedy about film extras scrabbling on the sidelines of show business, it occasionally advertised itself as a grotesque joke in the style of Fassbinder's *Satan's Brew*, but just as often came on like a Carry On.

The Spanish cinema had two substantial sections of its own, one devoted to the 40s and the other a 'homage' that seemed simply to be recent films, including two by Carlos Saura (or one film and a featurette, his stylish transcription of a flamenco ballet based on Lorca's *Blood Wedding*). But otherwise the most striking national presence was the curiously negative one, again a suggestion of religious denial, or self-mortification, of the Swiss. The new directors produced two elegant testimonies, the cool, alienated sense of landscape after Tanner perhaps, on the futility of being Swiss. In *Seuls*, directed by Francis Reusser, a young man in search of both his past and a way out of his prolonged adolescence falls in with a couple (Bulle Ogier and Michel Lonsdale) afraid of the future—that is, the prospect of having children. The film rather overplays the interest of

IN THE PICTURE

its perpetually mac-clad hero, although it gets more mileage than one might expect out of its images of stagnation. In *Nest-bruch*, by Beat Kuert, an old man, disillusioned with the turmoil and lack of community in modern Germany, travels back to see an old friend in idyllic Switzerland. The friend never materialises, but a community, a housekeeper and her two children, take him in and demonstrate the more insidious madness of tidy minds in a tidy society.

The cinema of disgust, the corruption of the world and the flesh, came in not so much for theological treatment as philosophical trashing in *Possession*, a visual headache and bout of intestinal grumbling (with creature effects by *Alien*'s Carlo Rambaldi) which turned up as a French entry, though in an English language version shot by a Polish director in Germany with a polyglot cast. In this light, its most remarkable achievement was to have helped Isabelle Adjani win the best actress award at Cannes. It was also the most striking instance of the current plague of international packaging.

San Sebastian saw Union Jacks unfurled for a 'British' entry, Walter Hill's drama of the Louisiana swampland, *Southern Comfort*. Hill, star Keith Carradine and co-writer and producer David Giler were on hand for one of the most trying rituals of the international film scene, the press conference. Cross-lingual inanities and obscurities vied with one another, until Hill—bearish in appearance and seemingly on the point of a defensive hibernation—grewled in response to a question about how he saw his role as a genre revisionist, 'That presupposes you always know who you are when you wake up in the morning.' It was an answer that possibly says much about the existential essence, or inertness, of the films that have now earned Hill quite a reputation in some quarters. Questions, however, soon veered back into international non-speak, inquiring into what he thought of Isabelle Adjani.

RICHARD COMBS



Walter Hill at press conference. Photo: Louise Sweet.



'Tales of Ordinary Madness': Ben Gazzara and Ornella Muti.

Venice

Golden Lion to Margarethe von Trotta's film about the Ensslin sisters

It is the fiftieth anniversary of the Venice Festival this year and Carlo Lizzani, the Italian filmmaker who has run the festival for the last two rather precarious years, hopes to be in command again. He had a hard time pulling it together in 1981 but at the end of the day could justifiably feel satisfied. Considering no one really knew whether the event was on or off until two weeks before it opened, the organisation was undoubtedly improved and large-scale disasters avoided. Even the half-day projectionists' strike, called to draw attention to the financial plight of the Italian cinema, scarcely ruffled matters. And the Biennale's Board of Directors, determined to make the festival a properly national as well as international event, actually welcomed it. It also assured Lizzani that, in 1982, the money—so long delayed in 1981—would be forthcoming earlier.

As for the films on display, it is amazing what a worthy prize-winner can do to send people home happy. Up to three-quarters of the way through the programme, most were bemoaning the fact that the only truly watchable movies were either American or made in America. Europe, and particularly Italy, had produced one disappointment after another. Suddenly along came Margarethe von Trotta's *The German Sisters* as the last competitive entry. Tumultuous applause greeted the director at the press conference, followed by another ovation in the Grande Salle, and we all knew we had seen the winner of the major Golden Lion. Practically every British distributor present

went after the film, only to be beaten back by a price hastily upped to £20,000. Shortly afterwards, however, Michael Myers, of Miracle Films, secured it for this country for rather less, largely because of the company's success in distributing *The Marriage of Maria Braun*.

The German title of the film translates as 'Leaden Times', after a line in a Hölderlin poem: 'I almost feel as if in leaden times.' And one rather expected yet another angst-ridden summation of a prosperous but guilt-ridden Federal Republic told through the story of the Ensslin sisters, Gudrun and Christiane, the first of whom was said to have committed suicide, with two Baader-Meinhof colleagues, in Stammheim prison. It is, I suppose, that in essence. But it is also a very moving and well-constructed account of the difficult relationship between the two sisters, daughters of a Protestant clergyman, whose temperaments could not have been more different. It also traces, within a stunning last section, Christiane's attempts to prove first to herself and later to others that Gudrun could not have committed suicide as the authorities suggested.

Von Trotta is adamant, since she has changed the names of the sisters, that this is a fictional story and not some campaigning thriller. That she made the film to explore possible attitudes towards change in society—those within the system (Christiane, a journalist and feminist) and those without (Gudrun, who resorted to violence as the 'only means of change'). The fact remains that she knows Christiane well, after first meeting her during the filming of the collaborative *Germany in Autumn*, and that Christiane has just written a book about her sister's death which suggests that she was somehow murdered. At any rate, *The German Sisters* is

von Trotta's most confidently handled film to date, and indeed one of the outstanding European films of its year.

Sidney Lumet's *Prince of the City*, Ulu Grosbard's *True Confessions*, Peter Bogdanovich's *They All Laughed* (not me), Ivan Passer's *Cutter's Way*, Brian De Palma's *Blow Out* (with John Travolta in attendance, fêted like a male version of Bo Derek), the inevitable *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and Marco Ferreri's *Tales of Ordinary Madness* were the American films on display. The only one not likely to reach this country in a hurry would seem to be the Ferreri, adapted from a Charles Bukowski short story, with Ben Gazzara as an alcoholic poet sleazing around Los Angeles with an assortment of girls in tow and not much talent on display. The film is superbly shot by Tonino Delli Colli, so that at least it looks marvellous, and is one of those oddities that at once seem desperately old-fashioned and really quite original. Those who like Bukowski, a figure from the 60s now fashionable again, will find it altogether true to the style of the writer, whose theory is that down-and-outs are not so much the flotsam of a predatory world as the only people who truly understand it. Ferreri's heart was always on his sleeve, but that seems an increasingly endearing trait at a time when people like Coppola use computers for plot-line manipulation.

There remains the sad case of Zanussi's *From a Far Country*, made in English with a largely familiar English cast and elsewhere dubbed rather horrendously. Lasting well over two hours in the version shown at Venice, it seemed to clump through Polish history, as evinced in the present Pope's lifetime, as if Lord Grade had put special outsize boots on it. Zanussi, who felt that many Italians wished to

beat him with political sticks for making it at all (Bertolucci actually said that the festival should not have mounted such a papist apologia, without seeing it) was dignified enough at the press conference to defuse the worst rhetorical bombs. Yet, watching the film going gradually downhill from its promising opening (the Pope as a child at a religious pageant, asking why Christ was drinking beer), one searched in vain for Zanussi's familiar rigour of exposition. NBC television have bought it for most of what it cost to make, but who else, one wonders, will see it? European directors of Zanussi's stamp make international co-productions at their cost unless they are strong enough to insist on the final cut. It has happened before to Zanussi with *The Catamount Killings*.

The jury, which included Zanussi and Bogdanovich, gave the Lion for the best first or second film to Emir Kusturica's *Do You Remember Dolly Bell?*, an attractive if uneven study of a Yugoslavian adolescent caught between socialist theory and capitalist practice; and two further Lions to the Brazilian *They Don't Wear Black Tie*, an oddly titled but effective political soap opera from Leon Hirszman, and *Golden Dreams* by Nanni Moretti, the only Italian film on display with a modicum of wit and imagination. But, *The German Sisters* apart, it was hardly an outstanding competition. Where had there been one in 1981?

DEREK MALCOLM

Moving images

A unique museum is planned by the BFI for the South Bank

Following the launch at the London Film Festival of a £4½m appeal, a division of the Greater London Council's architects' department, under Jake Brown, is soon to start work on detailed plans for the British Film Institute's Museum of the Moving Image. The museum will be tucked under Waterloo Bridge south of the National Film Theatre. It will be built over the existing sunken car park, and the foundation stone, it is hoped, will be laid in 1983, the BFI's 50th anniversary.

Plans for the new museum, which will be open for the hours of the NFT and will include as a focal point a 'telekinema' (in effect, NFT4) capable of exhibiting every kind of cinematic and electronic image, were first outlined in July 1979. Since then a committee under Lady Howe has been raising funds, and when the Institute's patron, the Prince of Wales, appealed at the LFF for money to meet the museum's building costs

and two years' running expenses, half the target sum had already been secured. The Hong Kong businessman Sir Yue-Kong Pao has promised £1m and the Garfield Weston Foundation £250,000. Mr Brown estimates that the museum, which will be joined to the NFT, should be fully planned by the end of 1982 and completed sometime in 1985.

The museum, which will showcase many of the BFI's holdings, has been pioneered by David Francis, of the National Film Archive, and in particular, perhaps, by Leslie Hardcastle, the NFT's administrator. It aims to trace—and herein, it is said, lies its uniqueness—the complete history of the moving image, in large part by using working pieces of equipment: the film editing table, TV camera, kinoscope and camera obscura. There will be a replica TV studio with an operational control room; and the telekinema, which will have a glass-backed projection box, will be able to call up an organ (part of a sound exhibit) to accompany silent films.

The service road outside the NFT's main entrance will become the foyer of both the NFT and the museum, while the museum's exterior walls will become, it is hoped, a sort of ever-changing light show serviced from within the building. The site itself is intriguing from an architectural point of view, especially since the part which is not confined beneath the bridge is overhung by the east side of the Hayward Gallery. Nevertheless, Jake Brown is confident that the integrity of the surrounding area can be preserved: he foresees perhaps 'a gleaming box' housing the telekinema's projection room, which will announce the museum in the same way that the nearby geometric pillar of lights announces the Hayward.

JOHN PYM

John Landis

The director of 'An American Werewolf at the London Festival'

A meeting or a lunch or a phone conversation with John Landis is an effective way of appreciating how self-confidence in Hollywood inevitably leads to success. Landis sports an old Beatle-style haircut and a thick beard and fires rapid, well-formed sentences at his interviewers, invariably before the question has been fully articulated. But Landis, who had to wait eleven years to make *An American Werewolf in London*, doesn't strike one as an impatient man; he's simply buoyed up with enthusiasm and it makes one wonder if a box-office catastrophe might prove too unsettling.

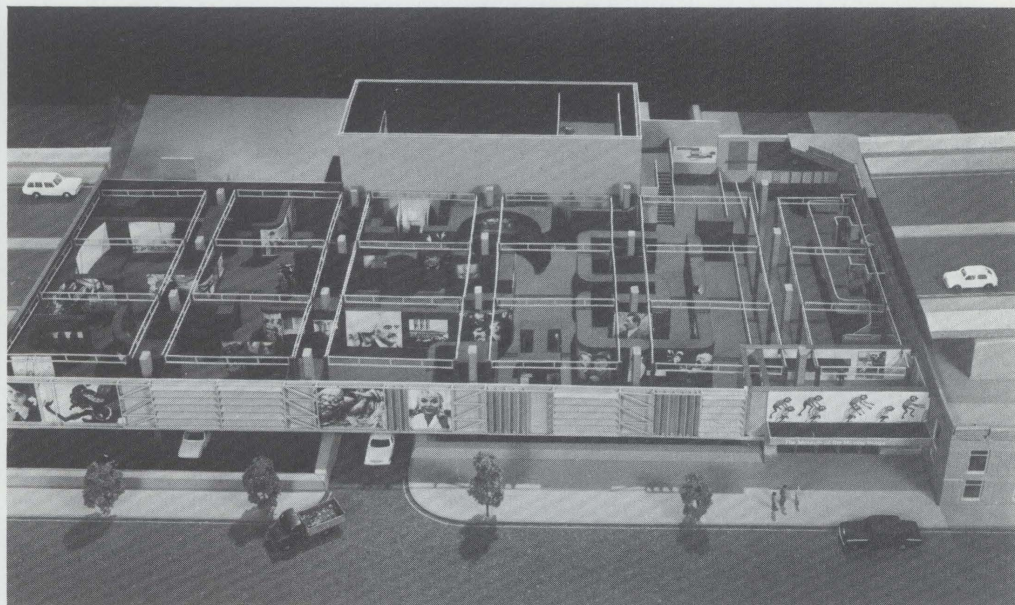
At 31, he's slightly younger than Lucas, Spielberg and the generation of so-called movie brats and is quick to point out that, unlike them, he didn't attend the UCLA Film School: 'I just attended movies and then became a gofer—go for this, go for that—at 20th Century-Fox. Then I was a stuntman and an uncredited writer.' The concept of the movie brats was in any case a generalisation. 'The image created is of a bunch of guys who ride bikes and wear black leather jackets and meet at the clubhouse once a week. There is actually an incredible diversity in their work—Spielberg and Scorsese, for instance, have little in common—but they all have grown up with the movies.'

Landis, who in a very short time has become one of the most bankable directors in Hollywood, acknowledges that studios and producers haven't much idea of what audiences want to see. 'You go to them with your idea, which might be really unusual, and all they care about is your track

record. If you made money for someone else you can do the same for them.' His first film, *Schlock*, which he describes as the cheapest and most self-indulgent movie ever made, turned a healthy profit though it remains unshown in Britain. His two campus comedies, *Kentucky Fried Movie* and *National Lampoon's Animal House*, were big successes in America. Of *The Blues Brothers* Landis says, 'I've grown tired of correcting journalists about the cost of the picture, but the fact is that it made a great deal of money and producers don't seem scared of hiring me.'

An American Werewolf in London has also proved a success with audiences in America and Europe. 'In the States we benefited from two advertising campaigns. I wanted something classy, not the usual monster movie campaign, so we had the two American backpackers on the poster looking rather anxiously behind them. The film did poor business in New York and Detroit but did well in white, middle-class areas. It seems the black audience stayed away because there were two ordinary white guys on the posters. Then we changed the design to the monster with his fangs and the black audience poured in.'

Landis is understandably aggrieved by the sudden presence on the screen of full moons and hairy monsters stalking the city streets. One suspects that the current lycanthropic revival has more to do with the advances in special effects technology which dispense with lap-dissolves and other optical effects than any sociological causes or mythical yearnings. Landis is at pains to stress that he wrote the script when he was working on *Kelly's Heroes* and has hardly changed a thing, 'except some of the dialogue—people don't say "groovy" any more.' He was traumatised when



Model by Mark Dalton of the proposed Museum of the Moving Image on the South Bank.

IN THE PICTURE

he saw Ken Russell's *Altered States*, which has a virtually identical sequence in which the hero returns to physical normality in a zoo, but he eventually decided to stick to the original, 11-year-old idea. As for the werewolf revival, Landis says, 'It's kind of alarming. I wonder what it means...'

Landis is full of praise for Rick Baker's special effects wizardry (and indeed the metamorphosis is a remarkable piece of engineering) and for the British crew who made the film. But he insists that making movies today is no different from what it was in the heyday of the studio system. 'Although individual people like Cedric Gibbons and Hans Dreier might have vanished from the huge studio art departments, the organisation and infrastructure has survived. In Hollywood, whatever you might need for a scene, from a 1961 lilac Studebaker to a trained animal, it's there the next morning ready for work. The city authorities are very co-operative for location work. In England the situation is different. We had to be extremely persistent to shoot in Piccadilly Circus, where you literally have to rely on the goodwill of the bobby on the beat, and even things like trained animals are difficult to get. You end up using one of the crew's pets and waste hours until it barks on cue. There is a myth, though, that you can achieve better special effects in Britain than you can in Hollywood. The truth is that you can get them cheaper in Britain, which is why *Star Wars* and *Superman* were based here.'

Landis is looking forward to his next project, a contemporary drama set in Los Angeles, which he hopes will free him from the label of comedy director. After that he plans a remake of *Dick Tracy* and then a return to Britain to realise his long-cherished project of Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee at the Court of King Arthur*, which Jenny Agutter reads to the unfortunate hero of *American Werewolf*.

ADRIAN TURNER

Laundryman

Robert Arden, Van Stratten in Welles' 'Confidential Report', remembers the film

One of the most intriguing if least flamboyant presences in the cinema of Orson Welles is that of Guy Van Stratten, unscrupulous leg-man for the omniscient millionaire Arkadin in *Confidential Report* (Mr Arkadin), and a character in whom Welles' debt to *Black Mask*-style fiction is particularly apparent. The actor who played Van Stratten was Robert Arden, and during a recent conversation with him in the rather unWellesian surroundings of the Churchill Theatre, Bromley, where he was playing the police commissioner in a revival of Edgar Wallace's *On the Spot*, mention of the film opened up on his part a fund of affectionate reminiscence.

Arden first worked with Welles on a *Harry Lime* radio series in London in the early 50s. He was cheerfully sceptical about promises to use him eventually in a movie, but a couple of years later, when he was appearing in the West End production of *Guys and Dolls*, he was startled to receive a telephone call from Welles in Spain baldly asking how soon he could be in Madrid for a film role. Surprise turned to astonishment when the director's (evidently informal) 'London representative', whose approval of the casting Welles said he wanted, proved next day to be no less than Carol Reed; and when Reed, whom Arden remembers as the soul of courtesy, revealed before giving his imprimatur that the role in question was the second lead.

Hired for three months, Arden stayed with Welles for over a year, as shooting took place in four European countries, the non-plussed French producer periodically flew off to Zurich to secure further financing, and Welles himself occasionally vanished



'Confidential Report': Akim Tamiroff and Robert Arden.

from the scene for less apparent reasons. From Arden's own point of view, things were not made easier by the way that the assorted guest stars—Michael Redgrave, Akim Tamiroff, *et al*—would be brought in for such brief spells that his own contributions to scenes with them were left to be shot 'cold', sometimes after an interval of several months. He recalls that Welles repeatedly put off the scenes involving the cheroot-smoking Sophie, eventually played by Katina Paxinou, in the hope of securing Marlene Dietrich for the role. (Though in a way Dietrich did play it later, as the fortune-teller in *Touch of Evil*.)

The lengthy dubbing process, in which the director characteristically provided voices for sundry parts, was not altogether helped by Welles' *post facto* dialogue changes. But Arden is emphatic that the original script was in the chronological sequence of Welles' source novel, and that the flashback structure (which some critics found disconcerting) was suddenly decided upon by Welles a little way into shooting. Apart from these considerations, and contrary to rumours of front-office tampering, the finished film essentially conformed, he says, to the shooting script.

Arden gave up acting for some years, but is now happily active again both in television and films, including Forman's *Ragtime*. He looks back philosophically to the failure of *Confidential Report* to give his own career a major boost: one trouble, he suggests, 'is that Van Stratten was 'a complete shit—he didn't even have the grace to get killed at the end.' For another, he wryly quotes the judgment of Akim Tamiroff, whose lifelong friend he became. 'We [the cameo players] were the laundry,' Tamiroff told him, 'and you were the laundry line—and nobody really looks at a laundry line.'

TIM PULLEINE

Ancient Britons

A correspondent reports on signals from space

Quiz for British vintage film buffs. Where can you see Bobby Howes in *Elopement*, Constance Cummings in *Holiday Romance*, Stanley Lupino in *Triple Trouble* and Leslie Fuller in *The Doctor's Secret*? Answer: in America, on the SPN Satellite from Washington, throughout the night.

All the titles have been altered. The real ones are as follows: *Over the Garden Wall* (BIP, 1934, the last picture directed by John Daumery); *Heads We Go* (BIP, 1933, directed by Monty Banks); *Honeymoon for Three* (ABFD, 1935, directed by Leo Mittler); and *Doctor's Secret* (BIP, 1934, directed by Norman Lee). Clearly they have bought a package of ancient British pictures, retitled them, and show them unannounced to night owls, shift-workers and visiting English film fans.

Other titles noted during a short trip last year: Raymond Massey in *Footsteps in the Sand* (*Black Limelight*), Gordon Harker in *Nobody Home* (*The Return of the Frog*), Bobby Howes in *The Romantic Valet* (*Yes, Madam*) and Leslie Perrin in *Desperate Night* (which might be *The Gables Mystery*, 1938). All the title sections have been removed or replaced. Sometimes they start with reel two. Occasionally I have seen an entire reel repeated. The copies have been duped and reduped almost to the point of extinction, and the soundtracks are often inaudible.

I have no idea how all this has come about, but I can honestly say it is worth the price of a ticket to America just to have Gert and Daisy in your bedroom at three in the morning! (In what, I wonder?)

JIM CLARK



'An American Werewolf in London'.

1981:Obituary

DECEMBER 1980: Peter Collinson, British director (*Up the Junction*, *The Italian Job*); Ben Travers, veteran playwright of the Aldwych farces, filmed in 30s; Grizelda Hervey, actress in theatre and radio (*Becky Sharp*, *The Informer*); Marc Connelly, playwright, screenwriter, whose *Green Pastures* offered an 'Uncle Tom' interpretation of the Bible; Fred Emney, outsize British comedian; Sam Levene, American character actor, specialist in city slickers; Karel Stepanek, Czech actor, often cast as wicked foreigner (*The Captive Heart*, *Sink the Bismarck*); Marshall McLuhan, Canadian communications specialist and media wizard.

JANUARY: A. J. Cronin, Scots physician and novelist whose works inspired many films (*The Citadel*, *The Stars Look Down*, *The Keys of the Kingdom*) and a television series, *Dr Finlay's Casebook*; Richard Boone, rugged actor in films (*The War Lord*, *The Alamo*) and television (*Have Gun Will Travel*); Beulah Bondi, American character actress; Bernard Lee, solid, reliable actor, 'M' in the Bond films; Isobel Elsom, statuesque English grande dame (*Ladies in Retirement*, *Monsieur Verdoux*); Richard Talmadge, actor in silent films, later director of action and stunt sequences (*How the West Was Won*, *Hawaii*); Allyn Joslyn, character comedian, player of supercilious shopwalkers and other snobs; Kathryn Crawford, musical star of the 30s (*Flying High*, *The King of Jazz*); Adele Astaire, Fred's dancing sister.

FEBRUARY: Mario Camerini, Italian director since the 20s, credited with 'discovering' De Sica, Zavattini and Castellani; Bill Haley, bandleader who set everybody rocking round the clock in *The Blackboard Jungle*; Wanda Hendrix, American leading lady (*Miss Tatlock's Millions*, *Prince of Foxes*); Ron Grainer, prolific Australian film music composer; Ketti Frings, screenwriter (*Come Back Little Sheba*, *The Shrike*); Curtis Bernhardt, German-born director, working in the US from 1940, mainly on melodrama (*A Stolen Life*, *Possessed*); Talbot Rothwell, scriptwriter of most of the *Carry On* series; Hugo Montenegro, composer for Westerns (*The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*).

MARCH: Bosley Crowther, critic and historian of MGM (*The Lion's Share*, *Hollywood Rajah*); Brenda de Banzie, blonde actress, Phoebe Rice in *The Entertainer*; Garry Marsh, portly character actor of the 30s and 40s (*Bank Holiday*, *The Rake's Progress*); René Clair; Eleanor Perry, screenwriter (*David and Lisa*, *The Swimmer*); Mark Donskoi, Russian director, internationally known for his 'Gorki trilogy'; Enid Bagnold,

novelist and playwright, creator of *National Velvet*; Ivor Beddoes, story-board and sketch artist (*The Red Shoes*, *Barry Lyndon*); Paul Hörbiger, Hungarian-born actor in Austrian and German films (*Congress Dances*, *The Gypsy Baron*).

APRIL: Norman Taurog, Hollywood director, former child actor (*Skippy*, *Boys' Town*); Marie Ney, English stage actress, only occasional films (*Seven Days to Noon*, *Yield to the Night*); Sergio Amidei, neo-realist screenwriter; Charles, Vicomte de Noailles, producer of early Cocteau and Buñuel films; Mai Harris, long-time supplier of English subtitles for foreign films; Madge Evans, sweet-faced leading lady, once a light star; Jim Davis, burly American supporting actor, patriarch of *Dallas*; Louis Fleury, doyen of 'directeurs de production' on European locations for British and American films.

MAY: Heinosuke Goshō, Japanese director, specialist in 'shomin-geki' or drama of the common people (*Four Chimneys*, *An Inn at Osaka*); Barry Jones, British character actor; Eddie Byrne, Irish character actor (*Odd Man Out*, *Time Gentlemen Please*); Gordon Parry, director (*Now Barabbas*, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*); Margaret Lindsay, genteel Hollywood actress (*Cavalcade*, *Jezebel*); William Saroyan, novelist and author of original story for *The Human Comedy*; Hugo Friedhofer, composer (*The Best Years of Our Lives*, *One-Eyed Jacks*); Jack Warner, former music-hall comedian, television's Dixon of Dock Green (*The Blue Lamp*, *The Captive Heart*); George Jessel, US vaudeville entertainer, film producer and actor; Boris Sagal, Russian-born director in film and television (*The Omega Man*); Nagamasa Kawakita, head of Japanese distribution giant Toho-Towa; Henry Blanke, producer who worked with Lubitsch and Lang, then put in many years with Warners in Hollywood; Irving Briskin, Columbia executive.

JUNE: Cecil Bernstein, Director of Granada Group; Richard Goolden, character actor of meek elderly gentlemen (*Meet Mr Penny*); Zarah Leander, Swedish singing star in German films during World War II; George Walsh, athletic actor, brother of director Raoul; Lola Lane, eldest of three Lane sisters, stars of a popular series beginning with *Four Daughters*; Russell Hayden, film technician turned actor, star of *Hopalong Cassidy* series and other Westerns; Alfred Santell, former writer who directed some notable literary films (*Winterset*, *The Hairy Ape*); Lotte Reiniger, creator of fabulous animated silhouette films; Martin Garralaga, veteran singer and actor (*Message to Garcia*, *Left-Handed Gun*); Ruth Miller, silent screen actress (*King of Kings*).

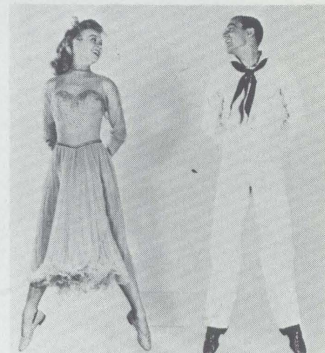
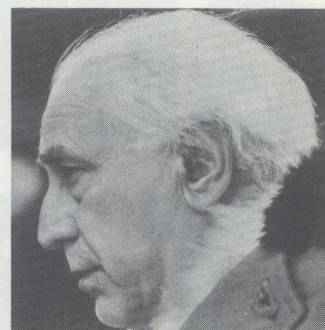
JULY: Jiri (George) Voskovec, Czech writer and actor in US films and television; Keefe Brasselle, American actor (*The Eddie Cantor Story*); Stephen Bosustow, animator, founder of UPA, creator of Mr Magoo; Edmund Grainger, producer for many Hollywood companies; Cecil Barge, manager, London's Curzon Cinema; Daisake Ito, Japanese director (*The Swordsman*, *Lion's Dance*); William Wyler.

AUGUST: Paddy Chayevsky, screenwriter (*Marty*, *The God-dess*); Melvyn Douglas; Jimmy Vaughan, independent distributor; Jessie Matthews; Anita Loos, veteran screenwriter (*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*); Denys Coop, British lighting cameraman (*This Sporting Life*, *King and Country*); Robert Krasker, Oscar-winning Australian cinematographer (*Henry V*, *The Third Man*); Glauber Rocha, Brazilian director, leader of Cinema Novo movement (*Black God, White Devil*); Valentine Tessier, French actress, associated with Renoir (*Madame Bovary*, *French Can Can*); Lowell Thomas, American pioneer broadcaster and maker of travel films, rescued Cinerama from the laboratory shelf (*This Is Cinerama*); Vera-Ellen, dancer in musicals (*On the Town*, *The Belle of New York*).

SEPTEMBER: Ann Harding, blonde, refined leading lady of the 30s and 40s (*Westward Passage*, *Peter Ibbetson*); Pierre Billon, French director (*Au revoir, M Grock*, *Cheri*); Frank McHugh, Warners' character actor, with an infectious giggle; Nigel Patrick, suave English actor and occasional director; Harry Warren, composer, songwriter ('Lullaby of Broadway', '42nd Street'); Robert Montgomery, smooth leading man who became director, notably of the 'camera eye' thriller *Lady in the Lake*; Patsy Kelly, comedienne familiar as the heroine's wisecracking friend (*Merrily We Live*); Sara Haden, Andy Hardy's Aunt Milly; Renée Cosima, French actress (*Les Enfants terribles*, *Orphée*).

OCTOBER: Chief Dan George, 'Old Lodge Skins' in *Little Big Man*; Gerald Sanger, Editor 'British Movietone News'; Robert McKenzie, television political journalist, inventor of the 'swingometer'; Nils Asther, Swedish leading man in Hollywood from 1927 (*Our Dancing Daughters*, *The Bitter Tea of General Yen*); Edith Head, top Hollywood dress designer; Gloria Grahame, sultry-voiced star of films of the 50s (*The Bad and the Beautiful*, *The Big Heat*).

NOVEMBER: Abel Gance, in the year of the great *Napoleon* revival; William Holden; Jean Eustache, director of *La Maman et la Putain*; Enid Markey, Tarzan's first Jane; Ghislain Cloquet, Belgian-born cameraman for Becker, Malle, Bresson, Demy; Lotte Lenya; Natalie Wood.



Top to bottom: Abel Gance, Robert Montgomery ('Lady in the Lake'), Heinosuke Goshō, Jessie Matthews ('Friday the 13th'), Vera-Ellen ('On the Town').

GETTING IT RIGHT

ELIZABETH SUSSEX looks at Granada's *Strike* and the drama-documentary case

The six-week filming schedule in and around Manchester for Granada Television's drama-documentary *Strike* was due to begin on 21 September 1981. The producer/director is Leslie Woodhead, who pioneered development of the drama-documentary at Granada and, with David Boulton in 1978, set up a special drama-documentary unit there. The week before filming he and writer Boleslaw Sulik (Bolek) are rehearsing the script in London with the actors: a concentrated course in Polish politics and culture as well as the origins of Solidarity (the subject of the film). It occurs to me that quite a research effort will be needed if my planned article about all this is going to match up to the pursuit of authenticity that is the basis of any film by Leslie Woodhead, who has been described as guardian of the drama-documentary conscience. I start out by

recording interview material with him.

'The project swam into view,' he says, 'as a result of an approach by Solidarity itself through Boleslaw Sulik, who had made it plain that there was a mass of previously undisclosed material that might be available. Their approach was because of our previous work on *Three Days in Szczecin*, which they were aware of. We heard that Walesa himself was aware of that and wanted to see it. All of that came together in a decision to go to Rome in January 1981 to contact a Solidarity delegation who were coming to see the Pope . . . So we went to Rome, stayed in the hotel they were staying in, met a number of people including Walesa and Anna Walentynowicz, and began to explore the possibility of making a programme . . . We found that there was a mass of tape-recorded verbatim material about the whole period of the strike, and

that right from Day One a really detailed record had been kept by many hands on home cassette recorders of everything that took place.'

More than 100 hours of taped evidence was acquired over a period of months through contacts in London, Paris and Poland. Apart from tapes of the original meetings, Woodhead and Bolek were able to talk to many of the Solidarity people who passed through London during the year, among them Bogdan Lis, Jadwiga Staniszkis and Anna Walentynowicz, who appears in the film. In addition, interviews were specially recorded in Poland with Andrzej Gwiazda, Bogdan Borusewicz, Alina Pienkowska, Lis, Walentynowicz and others.

'All these people were quizzed at length about exactly what they did, what they said to whom, in whose company they were, even what they were wearing and what the room looked like. It's been the most thorough crosscheck of sources that we've been able to do for one of these drama-documentaries. Bolek has also of course got extensive contacts in



the dissident loyal opposition community, so he has been able to communicate with people like Mazowiecki and Giere-mek and all of the Expert people. Normally we've been limited to a couple of sources, half a dozen at the outside, who crosscheck with one another.'

Woodhead started making drama-documentaries in 1970 because quite simply the form allowed him to do things he couldn't do in any other way. 'As a television journalist working on *World in Action*,' he recalled in a recent *Guardian* lecture at the National Film Theatre, 'I came across an important story, but found there was no way to tell it. The story was about a Soviet dissident imprisoned in a mental hospital. By its very nature, it was totally inaccessible by conventional documentary methods. But the dissident, General Grigorenko, had managed to smuggle out of mental prison a detailed diary of his experiences. As a result, it was possible to produce a valid dramatic reconstruction of what happened to Grigorenko.' (Woodhead's co-editor on *World in Action* in the late 60s was Jeremy Wallington, whose 'pre-occupation with standards of evidence and journalistic rigour, his obsession with trying to get it right, was really,' he says, 'the starting point and the most important part of the Grigorenko exercise.')

His second drama-documentary, *A Subject of Struggle*, Woodhead regards as 'a classic case of the legitimacy of the form'. This was about a senior Chinese lady put on trial by the Red Guards at the height of the Cultural Revolution: 'The Cultural Revolution has always been (but particularly when we made this film in 1972) an absolutely unguessable puzzle ... and of course no film of any duration has come out of China about it.

We got hold of the trial transcript, and I vividly remember reading it on a train journey and thinking this is absolutely incomprehensible. It's like material from Mars. But then we set about months of research, talking to sinologists here and trying to decode all these references and understand what it was about. By the end I felt in a position to use dramatisation to illuminate and articulate some of the most elusive material in a serious way. I can't imagine any other form which would allow us to make available to a mass television audience those themes, about something quite crucially important going on in a society which is completely closed to us.'

In the case of *Strike*, the thing that cannot be shown any other way is the development of a local economic grievance and a strike for the reinstatement of an individual (crane driver and former Heroine of Labour Anna Walentynowicz) into one of the most pivotal events in East/West politics since World War II. Until the government negotiators moved in (nine days after the beginning of the strike), nothing was being filmed because nobody could guess what a momentous thing was being born. The Polish documentary *Workers '80* was known about from the beginning of the project. Some of the actors are studying it, not for the first time, while Woodhead talks to me. 'Obviously there's no point,' he says, 'in simply redramatising something which is unforgettably done for real by the existing documentary record. The dramatisation allows us to look at the period before that, when that political evolution was

being thrashed out in a fairly painful fashion. For me, it's the most interesting and precise demonstration of what the limits of the viability of dramatisation actually are ... It's particularly fascinating for Bolek and me because of having done the Szczecin film, which was concerned with an oddly parallel event in 1970, like a dry run for these events. At every step you can feel the workers being informed by what went wrong in 1970, and taking that into consideration in working out how they're going to act this time.'

Tuesday, 6 October 1981. I join the film crew, 16 actors and 112 extras swarming round an excavator in the anonymous wasteland of the Manchester Docks. The people are dwarfed by empty hulks of warehouses in the near distance and the silhouettes of huge, immobile cranes against the sky. The scene they are setting up will replicate an event that took place in the Lenin shipyard at Gdansk on the morning of 14 August 1980—the first day of the strike. The instigators, calling for more support, are interrupted by Klemens Gniech (Jon Laurimore), managing director of the shipyard, who climbs up beside them on the top of the excavator and tells the crowd they must be sensible. The scene, recorded with streamlined efficiency in long-shot, mid-shot and close-up from behind the workers and from the reverse angle, is in the can in time for a quick



rehearsal of the next scene before an early lunch break. I can watch it on a video viewer beside the sound recordist. Leslie Woodhead has his own portable version of this. The next scene will be Ian Holm's first appearance in the role of Lech Walesa. Woodhead is shooting the script as closely as possible in chronological order, and so far nothing has interfered with this.

It starts to rain. Covers are placed over the excavator. No problem for an hour, but by the end of the lunch break the rain is teeming down. Everyone stares out at it from the draughty shelter of the nearest warehouse. Woodhead, alone with the responsibility, paces about the hideously bleak terrain. His right arm is in a sling as a result of breaking it in a fall through the set of the gatehouse of the Lenin shipyard some ten days earlier. 'Sad, yes,' says Bolek, 'like a broken wing. It was quite dramatic the way he did it. When he landed there was a sort of puff of dust.' At 2.10 p.m. Woodhead says he will start shooting in 50 minutes whether the rain has stopped or not: 'The only things that prevent shooting in the rain are puddles which you don't get here, and long lenses against a dark background which you don't get here.' The ground is gravelly but so persistent is the downpour that serious puddles start to form. At 3 p.m. it's raining too hard to ask anyone to take the risk of climbing on top of the slippery excavator. Jon Laurimore wishes he could have solved the problem by simply saying, 'Let's be sensible and continue this meeting over there, out of the rain.' But it wasn't raining in Gdansk that morning, so everyone just waits until it's too late to film the scene that day. The last thing that happens: Sue Pritchard photographs the set-up for continuity purposes. 'She's a perfectionist,' someone says. 'Who's going to notice if the excavator has been moved a little?'

In the evening I record an interview with Boleslaw Sulik, who is present in an advisory capacity during most of the filming. He tells me that at first they considered using a mixture of archive film and staged material—archive for the exteriors and reconstruction for the interiors. Their main reason for not doing so was the opposite of the superficially held view about such matters: 'It was almost impossible to devise a structure that would absorb a large amount of archive material without creating really a culture shock. You have to translate it into English idiom. You can have a documentary introduction and perhaps epilogue, but the body of the film has to be consistent.' He felt too that films like *Workers '80* were 'a kind of political theatre which hid to some extent the real political struggle behind the scenes.' What they could reconstruct was a very different matter: 'We are quite sure what the political process inside the shipyard was, and we became excited about how much was crammed into this 17 days, how much of the actual political development and education, the shifting relationships, the changing political perspective all the time. I was excited by

this as a political story, not *only* because I'm a Pole and of course very responsive to the imagery as well as to the political content.'

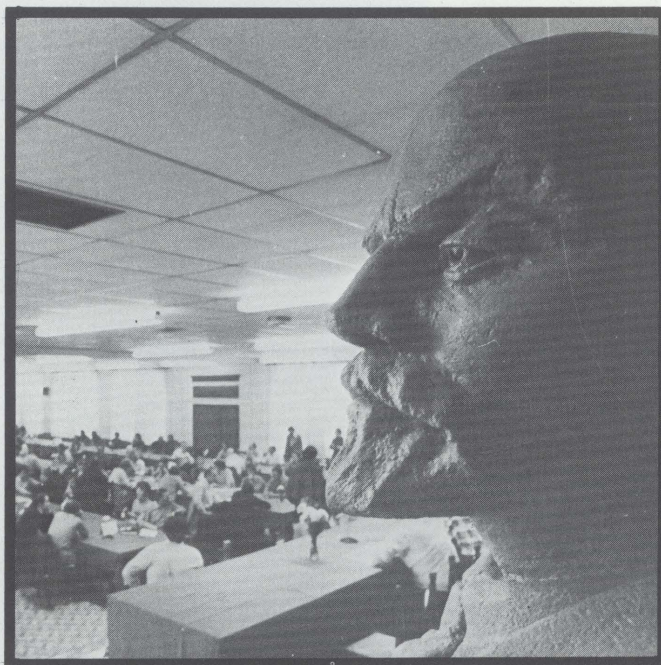
Bolek hopes they are going to be able to articulate something of that specifically Polish response—the fact, for instance, that the Communist régime's use of the rhetoric of revolution has completely failed with the workers, who still respond to traditional images associated with past oppression. 'Nobody would dream in the Gdansk shipyard, or now in Solidarity, of addressing another worker as "comrade". They actually address each other as "pan" which means "sir" or "Mr". There's an incongruity, a sort of absurdity about the fact that they've taken over the heritage of the former Polish ruling class. That's the significance, to me, of the fact that the Polonaise, the most courtly music imaginable, was actually played in the shipyard, and the workers felt moved by it... There are some incongruous things about Solidarity, and that dimension is difficult to communicate to an English audience, but I would like at least to refer to it.'

Wednesday, 7 October. We assemble at 8.30 a.m. in designer Roy Stonehouse's impressive replica of the BHP ('Safety and Hygiene') conference hall. Built inside a huge rehearsal room across the road from the Granada offices, this is the biggest set that Woodhead has so far worked on. Like the original, the hall has no supporting pillars—something hard to find in such an enormous public space. Perhaps the most arresting 'detail' is an eight-foot statue of Lenin, sculpted in polystyrene, which dominates one end of the elevated platform.

In order to get the sets right, Woodhead and Stonehouse went to Gdansk in the spring of 1981 and, describing themselves as a two-man trade union delegation from Liverpool, managed to gain entry to the Lenin shipyard. 'Solidarity met us inside the yard,' says Woodhead, 'and in fact we had a long

talk with a very charismatic young man who turned out to be Jurek Borowczak, the man who actually started the strike on the first morning. Then he and half a dozen other Solidarity officials showed us the site where the excavator was where Walesa made his first speech to the workers, showed us the admin. building where the shipyard manager kept the broadcasting system to himself, the big negotiating hall where the delegates met, the BHP clubroom where the negotiations with the government took place and, most interestingly, the little room which was called the Experts' room, where some of the behind-closed-doors negotiations went on. It's a difficult thing to get into, and we were able to peep round the door of that as well. Stonehouse sort of flicked his eyes over all that and managed to draw sketches in his pocket, God knows how, but that's one of his acquired skills. Then when we got out of the yard he sat down in the car and for about half an hour simply sketched out everything he could remember of what he had seen—colour references, scale, materials of wood or whatever...'

'We have a kind of shorthand going,' says Stonehouse, who first worked with Woodhead in 1968 and has accompanied him on most of his research trips into eastern Europe. 'When we go into places we don't actually talk to one another. He collects the information he needs, and I collect the information I need, and we come back and put it together.' Their adventures on these journeys would make a lovely film. On *Three Days in Szczecin* in 1976 they narrowly escaped arrest when Woodhead was stopped by the police for exceeding the speed limit while driving round the, then heavily guarded, dockyards. Stonehouse, concealed under a coat, was filming the scene with an 8mm camera from the back seat. Researching *Invasion* in Czechoslovakia in 1979, the pair walked boldly into the Central Committee Presidium building, where Stonehouse bamboozled the guards with incessant chatter about finding someone who spoke English and



being shown round the 'Czech House of Commons'.

On *Strike* several hundred still photographs taken at the time also provide invaluable reference not only for design, wardrobe, make-up, but for the actors who, as always in Woodhead's films, aim to convey as strong a physical resemblance to their real-life counterparts as possible. Granada's head of casting, Doreen Jones, has worked on all Woodhead's drama-documentaries and, in his words, 'become very sensitive to the kind of underplaying which is crucial to the feel of these things.' Actors' attitudes vary enormously to the peculiar responsibility imposed on them by this form. Woodhead recalls that one of the actors in *Three Days in Szczecin* 'had a wretched, sleepless night imprisoned in his dilemma about the impossible obligations of representing a living person' but came out of it deciding 'that there was a legitimate role for him in the terms stated by the programme itself... Some of my leading actors have met the people they were eventually to impersonate. Others have gone out of their way not to do that. I think Ian feels that, having done the work he has done, reading about, watching, thinking about Walesa, his task now is to try to articulate that, and it wouldn't be at this stage helped by an encounter with the man himself.'

The scene being reconstructed began at 1.30 pm on 14 August 1980. The management team arrive late for the meeting. Gniech agrees to re-employ Anna Walentynowicz providing she accepts a job in the co-operation department, but hedges about a written undertaking to re-employ Walesa himself. Walesa gives up the argument quite suddenly. As Woodhead put it, 'Round one to Gniech.'

There is a mixture of exits and entrances to be choreographed like a ballet and big close-ups that hang on the movement of an eyebrow. The lighting is dim by conventional filming standards: little more than the fluorescent lights already in the hall. Cameraman Mike

Whittaker, who shot Woodhead's last two drama-documentaries and worked with him on many a *World in Action* in far-flung places years before (another shorthand going here), is using the Zeiss Distagon fixed lenses initially developed to cope with low-light situations on news and actuality programmes. These lenses allow a larger aperture than any others in the armoury (f1.3 as opposed to the usual maximum of around f2) with a consequently minuscule depth of field. The nose can be in focus and the eyeballs out. For the entry of the management team, the assistant cameraman lays white boxes along the table and runs a tape measure out to each. These are physical checkpoints that enable him to see exactly when to pull focus—something that cannot be seen simply by looking through the viewfinder.

'One thing that I've been very intrigued to try to understand,' says Woodhead, 'is why medium telephoto shots seem to have a smack of reality about them. Once you get up to around 70 or 80mm there's something about the texture of the picture which feels curiously real. It can only be to do with the fact that so much newsreel and documentary, simply because the cameraman can't get very close to it often, is on that medium telephoto lens.'

Thursday, 8 October. The reconstruction of the meeting on the first day of the strike continues. Walesa makes a sudden, outright demand for a monu-

ment to be erected outside the shipyard gate in memory of the workers who died there in clashes with the police in December 1970. The monument becomes a crucial issue in an atmosphere of mounting tension: an impassioned speech by Anna Walentynowicz (Frances Cox) and a reference by one of the workers to the still taboo subject of the massacre of Polish officers by the Soviet authorities at Katyn during World War II. Gniech is forced to refer the matter to a higher authority and, in the next scene filmed, announces an agreement in principle for the monument to be erected. Now the meeting has been augmented by a crowd of interested spectators, and a smoke machine comes into play. I notice that 'Lenin', who from any angle other than the camera's seems remote, in fact in some shots looms right over the heads of the leading members of the management team. Holm's performance is gathering momentum as Walesa's did, and at the end of the scene Woodhead gives a start of pleasure at what he sees in his small viewer.

Another scene: the meeting continues on 15 August 1980. 'People are looking tired and droopy, which may not be too hard to simulate,' says Woodhead, who chose to overlook the fact that one or two of the extras actually fell asleep the previous day. Because he long since discovered the advantage of getting synchronised reactions to real speeches rather than fabricating them, the full complement of extras is always on the set



Left to right: Lenin in the conference hall; the Gdansk shipyard gates reconstructed; Leslie Woodhead, Ian Holm, Boleslaw Sulik and production assistant Sue Pritchard; Ian Holm (Walesa) at a shipyard service.

even when not reacting and not appearing in the shots. Six people representing the Young Poland Movement are handed over to Boleslaw Sulik to tell them who and what they are. The smoke is disappearing as soon as it is manufactured. Can the ventilators be sucking it away? It seems the negotiations are going badly. Life is like that. Or is it?

The more you probe the more meta-physical the question becomes, because Woodhead's films now draw on so much unpublished and unassessed material as to make them not just authentic but authoritative documents. For example, *Collision Course*, which he made in 1979 and which contains a second-by-second reconstruction of the last ten minutes before the world's worst midair collision over Zagreb in 1976, is being examined at the time of writing as material evidence in a re-opened inquiry into the events of 1976 and the standards of safety at Zagreb Air Traffic Control. Beyond this, we seem to be in the area of Absolute Truth. 'Well, the superiority of Absolute Truth over mere accuracy doesn't need my recommendation,' said Woodhead in his *Guardian* lecture. 'But that's surely more valuable as a corrective against arrogance than as a prescription invalidating notions of journalistic accuracy. "Getting it right" does have validity in journalistic terms, not against the standards of an elusive absolute "Truth" but against standards of evidence as they might be understood in a court of law.'

In *Strike* what we are getting is as accurate as possible a rendering, or paraphrasing, of speeches and conversations that actually took place, even to a worker's extraordinary exclamation, 'We are haggling here over the dead heroes like blind beggars under a lamp post'—a simile indeed to wonder at! Its inclusion in the screenplay is as good an example as any of the myriad of choices still open to a drama-documentarist who never once diverges from the evidence of over 100 hours of tape. Every camera set-up is in the same subjective category, every performance, every decision in the cutting room. What does this tell us about the end product? To quote the Woodhead lecture for the last time: 'If we accept that dramatised documentary can only be a subjective construct, we must allow that the same is inevitably true to some degree of current affairs documentary and of news itself.' He went further to point out that drama-documentary at least allows clear signposting: 'When I make an observational documentary with many of the same editorial interventions, it's both much more difficult for the audience to locate the subjective content, and for me to find a way to tell them about it.'

In this context Woodhead particularly admires Robert Vas' drama-documentary about the Katyn Forest massacre (... *The Issue Should Be Avoided*) for the bold way in which it states its credentials from the outset. (A group of actors approach a forest clearing, and the commentary is telling us, 'This is not the Katyn Forest in the Soviet Union. It would not be possible to film this inves-

tigation there. It is a forest near London, in autumn 1970. And these men are not survivors or eye-witnesses, but actors.' As the actors sit down at a long table, the commentary gives us their names and tells us what they represent: 'the Polish standpoint, the viewpoint of the Soviet Union...' etc.)

'At that time and to this day,' says Woodhead, 'it remains an enormously courageous and frank way of revealing to the audience exactly what your film is doing and how it plans to do it—quite apart from the fact that the format he had chosen, a sort of tribunal of inquiry, gave him a totally organic means of bringing in extraneous evidence. Instead of having to use archive material and books and quotations in the stuck-on arbitrary way that compilation documentary often has to do, he was able, inside that court of inquiry format, to call it in as evidence. The whole thing had so much structural coherence that it was a delight to look at, apart from being an immensely powerful piece of television.'

'I think that no two drama-documentaries actually are alike. They constantly reinvent the form. I'm aware of that about my own things. Although they try to apply certain basic guide rules, no two of them are quite formally alike. There are always new difficulties... And I just felt that that film, more I think than any other I've seen, brilliantly solved all those problems at one swoop. The astonishing thing was that, despite the apparent colossal alienation of having actors declare themselves in that way, how moving it was, how much more moving than it would have been to have people pretending to be the roles they were playing... So I found the signposting in that case in a curious way upped the emotional impact, which is an extraordinary sort of paradox, not what you would expect at all.'

I must here declare a powerful interest—the continuing, constructive influence on me of having worked with Robert Vas. In his political films Robert was often trying to get it right in opposition to amazing pressures to keep it wrong, but that is certainly another story. He rarely made a film that could be called a drama-documentary, but on the inventive front it seems relevant to mention the way he sometimes summoned the aid of poets to speak for those condemned to silence. In his huge film *Stalin* quotations from Anna Akhmatova are integral to the action and a few lines of hers, about a tiny incident in a prison queue in Leningrad, rang through that whole year-long production, echoing the director's case so poignantly that everyone, including Robert, had to laugh: 'Then a woman with lips blue with cold who was standing behind me, and of course never heard of my name, came out of the numbness which affected us all and whispered in my ear—(we all spoke in whispers there): "Can you describe this?" I said, "I can!"'

Poetry signposts itself and automatically commands greater respect in the truth stakes than prose. It might be worth considering why that is, especially when the creative treatment of actuality

in terms of images instead of words arouses such profound suspicion that the problem is how to convince without taking positively counter-productive measures. When Robert made (in 1974) the first documentary film ever to reconstruct the experience of the vast majority of the British population during and after the General Strike of 1926, the few people not immensely moved by it objected on essentially two counts: that he failed to signpost certain film excerpts (notably shots made in the Depression years and not during the strike itself), and that he got the details about a cricket match wrong. The latter (although heinous) fault hardly seems to invalidate the whole exercise. The former is in that area of peculiar challenge that confronts the documentarist as opposed to the compiler. Can you describe this? Well, not by strewing captions over every shot and distracting attention from the narrative flow in order to provide constant reference to information irrelevant to all but academics. In fact, however many footnotes you append about source material, you are still interpreting that material and the validity of your interpretation still has to be taken on trust.

The risks incurred by too obtrusive signposting seem to me demonstrated in Leslie Woodhead's enormously sincere *Three Days in Szczecin*. The initial emphasis here on defining the evidence and indicating its differing status (primarily a smuggled tape, and secondarily eye-witness accounts that enabled Boleslaw Sulik to write imaginative reconstructions of certain scenes) made the subject itself quite hard to come to grips with. The complex structure of flashbacks (fine to go into but increasingly disorienting to come out of) added to the feeling of participating in an intellectual exercise and being emotionally distanced from the real experience the film was trying to show. My reaction is certainly not shared by everyone, because these very alienating factors have been particularly praised for serving, as indeed they do, as a constant reminder of the artifice of the whole operation. *Three Days in Szczecin* is certainly important in establishing the method of signposting, through the commentary, that is the hallmark of Woodhead's later, much more involving films.

In *Collision Course* (written by Martin Thompson) and *Invasion* (1980, written by David Boulton and reconstructing the events surrounding the Soviet occupation of Prague in 1968), the same strict rules about the clarification of sources are applied, but this is no longer detracting from the inherent drama of the subjects which is increasingly, I think, coming out of the performances. Now Woodhead and the actors are using the mounds of documentation, all the source material that in his philosophy commands the maximum respect, in order to explore quite openly the underlying psychology of what occurred. So the stories are acquiring new dimensions, spreading outwards, connecting with us all. Antony Sher (in *Collision Course*) is more than the young air traffic controller who falls victim to the Yugoslav government's search for a

scapegoat; he is any imperfect individual luckless enough to make one wrong move in any of our faulty systems. The nuances of behaviour (in *Invasion*) between Czech party secretary Zdenek Mlynar (Paul Chapman) and the young Russian officers who hold him prisoner, or between Dubcek (Julian Glover) and the Russian colonel whom he once met at a dinner party in Moscow, turn apparently unfamiliar political territory into a place we really knew of all along.

Ian Holm (in *Strike*) seems to be going even further. As Boleslaw Sulik puts it, 'Walesa, who is a demagogue and a manipulator and the leader, in a sense invites speculation . . . and Ian very brilliantly in his performance gives a range of options, of interpretations of this character. We are still not interested in the purely private features of this personality, but what he is as a man in fact has a public dimension, and the film to some extent is a speculation about what it takes to become a leader of such a movement.'

What exactly has been happening between Woodhead's first dramatic reconstruction and this? 'The Grigorenko film is stylistically rather curious,' he says, 'because it's full of filmic invention and very baroque camera movement which I guess, looking at it now, really is a cover for my own insecurities about what to do with the camera while the information was chugging along. I've felt an increasing drive since then to simplify and to do less and less in terms of self-regarding or noticeable things with the camera. I suppose for anybody who's interested in that low key, overheard photography, the person who's shown us all the right direction is Ken Loach. I've always loved the way his films look, and the astonishing visual and aesthetic self-confidence that allows him so boldly to put cameras in positions and stay with them even when it makes images which are, in any conventional terms, the very opposite of engaging. Just the power of the performances he then generates legitimises that . . . I've certainly spent years

trying to screw up my own courage to the point of that degree of self-effacement.'

Woodhead, unlike Loach, never uses improvisation. He is, as he puts it, 'imprisoned by definition in text', but the style of his shooting (always now on fixed lenses with no zooms, and always with practically no lighting apart from that already existing in the locations) is increasingly geared to a similarly searching amalgam of documentary and drama: 'One could certainly set up the sort of scenes we're doing, and I could say to an amazingly talented cameraman like Mike Whittaker (who's spent most of his filming life with the camera on his shoulder shooting *World in Action* and many another thing on a completely hand-held documentary basis), "ok Mike, it's happening over there. Go in and do the best you can with it," which is what one would have done with *World in Action*. I feel that's a sort of blind alley and a dishonesty in a sense, to try to pretend to the audience that you *don't* have control. But having accepted that, I'm interested, as I say, in disappearing as far as possible in terms of the conventions of dramatic photography.'

Sunday, 25 October. I interview Boleslaw Sulik again in London. He tells me that, at the end of five weeks' filming, the excavator scene I went to see is not yet in the can, and has become the joke problem of the production.

'We returned to it the week before last. It was cold but very sunny and with a beautiful light. But it turned out that the excavator was quite different. The excavator that we shot was somewhere in the centre of Liverpool, and in fact it was not only different but the roof was not safe to stand on. After many deliberations we decided to shoot it not on the roof but on the base of the excavator. We didn't have time to reshoot the whole scene, so the question was would that cut with the previous stuff. Having looked at the rushes we decided not only that it *won't* but Leslie said we can't compromise in such a way . . . So he decided to go there

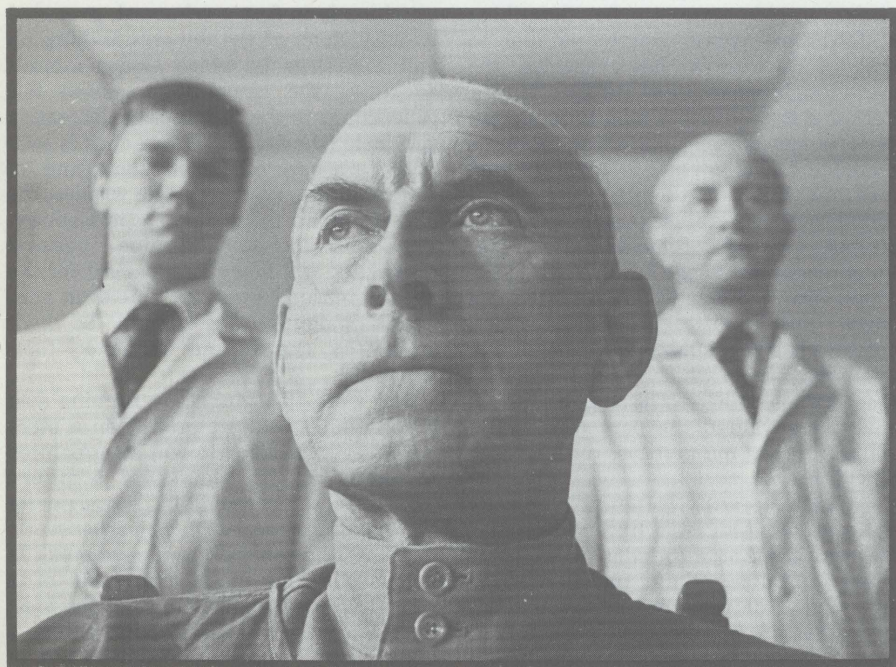
once again, to get the original excavator from Liverpool and reshoot the whole scene. Now our problem is that one of the original actors is no longer available on that day . . .'

Curiously, such insuperable odds are always overcome. Meanwhile, marvellous things seem to have been happening the previous week: 'Four out of five days were on the main set, the BHP hall, culminating in the scenes which were both the crucial point of the strike and the first time we had as many as 220 extras, who themselves generate a lot of excitement . . . I think we've been talking about it before, that the strike in Gdansk was as much a cultural event as a political event, that it was a kind of freedom festival which could only be expressed in those traditional cultural terms which are, after all, very exotic to the Western audience. I've realised more than ever during the last two weeks, that there is very little one can do to translate it into the British cultural structures, that what one needed was a kind of emotional charge to bridge that gap. I am pretty convinced that this has happened—partly through Ian Holm's performance, but mainly because a relationship between him and the crowd suddenly materialised. I'm no longer worried about making this cultural transition. I think it's going to work.'

Woodhead's films never stop at themselves: 'They inevitably spill into the world that they're depicting and they've nearly all gone on ringing through my professional life in curious and unexpected ways.' When the Grigorenko film was first transmitted, the General was in a psychiatric prison where he seemed likely to end his days. Not so. Some eight years later, Woodhead actually met him in New York and showed him the film. Grigorenko thought the film very accurate and spoke highly of the late Hamilton Dyce's impersonation of him. His only stricture was that the conditions in his KGB cell were really much worse than the film-makers' worst imaginings had shown. Woodhead's story goes on: 'He was there with his wife, who is immensely impressive, and they both cried, and he told me that he thought that, extraordinarily, the fact of the film materially shortened his sentence . . . The KGB said to him that a bourgeois activist had made a film about him, and then he smiled and he said, "But I never dreamed I would meet that same bourgeois activist face to face."'

So they made a postscript, a *World in Action* programme in which a long interview with General Grigorenko and his wife was crosscut with extracts from Woodhead's first drama-documentary, *The Man Who Wouldn't Keep Quiet*.

As I write, events in Poland change almost every day. Press cuttings and cartoons showing Solidarity as alternately a tiny group of moonstruck revelers ringed round by tiers and tiers of tanks or a great dragon restrained only by the flimsiest leash, proliferate about the room. It all seems very close now, very urgent. Whatever the postscript to this is, it affects us all. ■



'The Man Who Wouldn't Keep Quiet': Hamilton Dyce.

LONDON 25

Tom Milne and
Gilbert Adair write
about some of the
films in the 1981
London Film Festival

TOM MILNE

In what has by general consent been a notably bad year for movies, the 1981 London Film Festival, optimistic as ever, has swelled to even more dropsical proportions: 123 features, by the last conservative count. Faced by the certain knowledge that there aren't that many good or interesting new films available for programming even in a good year, the critic (or prospective spectator) is soon reduced to a state of bemused pessimism. The temptation is to opt for the gilt-edged securities and to forget the unknown quantities. Which not only means that any hidden gems are likely to stay that way, but is beside the point of at least part of the exercise: the dissemination of films which might not otherwise acquire an audience.

For the purposes of this report, written before the festival ended because of inflexible press deadlines, I saw 46 features. Of these, in my opinion, fifteen ranged upwards from enjoyable to

outstanding; the rest downwards from just tolerable to unwatchable. Point taken when festival director Ken Wlaschin responds to critical blasts about any particular film by retorting that tastes differ. But it is also a well-known fact that you can find somebody to defend any film if you look hard enough. If, however, the festival is to continue the policy of showing something for everybody, something surely must be done about the programme blurbs.

A perennially difficult problem, God knows, given the air of hyperbole that arises when these blurbs are usually, and quite understandably, written by (or quoted from) a film's most ardent admirer. But most critics, writing for their own papers, know who they are writing for; and their readers come to trust or to be wary of their enthusiasms and blind spots. In the current LFF programme booklet, however, both writer and reader tend to be working blind. How is any spectator, of whatever cinematic persuasion, to know where to place his faith when his attention is solicited (with apologies to the doubtless sterling qualities of these critics) by such scarcely household sources as 'Christopher



GILBERT ADAIR

A critic, briefed to 'cover' an event as indiscriminately eclectic as the LFF has become, can't be blamed for endeavouring to impose a modicum of cohesion on his material, at however great a risk of violence to the overall 'incoherence' (a word I do not necessarily use in a pejorative sense) of the Festival's own criteria. Though the extreme catholicity of its selection, expanded to bursting point in 1981's bizarre bazaar (as Jouvét almost said in *Drôle de drame*), precludes the spotting of any more or less self-evident trend, I couldn't help but be struck by the profusion of literary adaptations and, specifically, of films about writers. It must be symptomatic of something that, in what doesn't pretend to be an exhaustive catalogue, facsimiles of D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, Alexandre Dumas fils, Christian Grabbe, Francis Carco, Colette, Proust, the Finnish Lassila and the Portuguese Pessoa, Sa-Carneiro and Castelo Branco were all in evidence over a mere three-week period.

Of the literary adaptations proper, neither Terayama's *Les Fruits de la passion* (*The Fruits of Passion*) nor Saura's *Bodas de Sangre* (*Blood Wedding*) need detain one too long. Terayama, whose career would seem to be describing a downward spiral exactly parallel to that of Borowczyk, has respected the overwrought narrative of Pauline Réage's *Retour à Roissy* with a fidelity as slavish as it is unwelcome, since the novel, a sequel to *L'Histoire d'O*, is unadulterated tosh. In spite of the expected visual compensations—a lusciously gaudy recreation of 1920s Shanghai, the occasional arresting image transfixed on the screen like a dead butterfly—the film's bogus socio-political overtones and insidiously cynical obscenity (considering the indignities to which she subjects herself, Isabelle Illiers, the lugubrious O, must have wanted the part very badly) make for an indigestible, not to say rancid, brew.

Though elegantly, often dynamically shot, Saura's film is so uncomplicated a record of the Antonio Gades ballet (itself based on Lorca's florid melodrama) as virtually to defy serious criticism. But, given that it was one of the rare festival entries to hold its audience spellbound

from start to finish, it's worth remarking how neatly it turns a few of the avant-garde's more austere precepts to respectable middlebrow ends. Thus, it wiffully exposes its own artifice (what we are watching is in fact a rehearsal, preceded by cosy shots of the dancers making up and a passage in which Gades himself addresses the camera); it makes few concessions to the demands of decorative spectacle (the entire performance is confined to a bare rehearsal room); and, of course, it tells its simple tale without the aid of either dialogue or commentary. Yet, as a tastefully wrapped cultural package, it will make an ideal gift for the 'discriminating' filmgoer; and even confirmed balletophobes should be kept awake by the furious flamenco foot-stamping.

Bill Forsyth's *Andrina*, running just fifty minutes and adapted from a story by George Mackay Brown, disappointed a number of his staunchest admirers, who were understandably nostalgic for the cheerful ruderies of his earlier work. The basic problem is the original, a delicate if over-familiar account of a retired Orkney sea captain and the mysterious young woman who pays him a daily visit to tease his memories out of

Adcock, *Filmex*, 'Steven Klady, *Variety*', 'Larry Kart, *Chicago Tribune*', 'Bruce McCabe, the *Boston Globe*'?

To say this is not necessarily to ask for 'name' critics; merely for a measure of consistency and a good deal more rigour. Those who look to the NFT for 'good cinema', for instance, have the right to expect warning not to expect much more than commercial potboiling from such as *Mommie Dearest*, *Tell Me a Riddle*, *Stepfather*, or even *Gallipoli*.

Some of the selections (*Possession*, *Subway Riders*) are so abominably directed, execrably acted and pretentiously conceived that there is no excuse. Others, like *Killer of Sheep* (that old humanist view of the black ghetto) or *Father and Son* (Hong Kong appropriating Truffaut's territory of small boys and cinéphilie) hardly make exciting viewing but do at least reveal qualities arguably worth encouraging. But by far the largest and most debatable area of the festival concerns documentary and its quasi-fictional offshoots. For once no new Wiseman film this year, but everything else seemed to be on the menu, from street gangs, jazz musicians, pop groups, race relations, cultural minorities

and vivisection to Soweto, Ireland, politics, revolution, homosexuality, nuclear survival and Dr Robert Oppenheimer.

Time was, in the balmy days of Rouch and Leacock, Marker and Resnais, when the sort of documentaries shown at festivals unmistakably boasted film-makers behind the camera. Now everybody is getting into the act, and the jackpot question is whether the accolade of a festival screening is likely to encourage these miners of raw information to go on marketing their product in its crude state instead of calling in a genuinely creative camera eye. They may of course learn by experience and become film-makers themselves; but they may also weigh ponderously enough to cause their efforts to sink without trace. A case in point is Brigitte Berman's *Bix*. Hooked on the music of Bix Beiderbecke, Ms Berman (a producer for Canadian television) apparently spent several years of spare time in tracking down, interrogating, and ultimately filming survivors willing to reminisce about this legendary cornet player who brought the black sound to white jazz and who died in 1931 at the age of twenty-eight.

Researched with care and devotion,

setting out all the known facts and quite a few unknown, the film would be exemplary had it not stumbled unwarily into every conceivable trap. Faced with the lack of archive footage, it employs an actor to impersonate Beiderbecke; the interviews, more often adulatory than enlightening, are filmed in stock TV style; linking or background passages are filmed in colour, instantly setting up a clash with the mood evoked by period stills; it resorts far too frequently to the travelogue-style services of a narrator; and most unforgivably of all, it is so busy disbursing information (or waxing tearful about Beiderbecke's drinking problem and untimely end) that it relegates Beiderbecke's music to the sidelines.

Compare Lorenzo DeStefano's superb *Talmage Farlow*, which tackles a similar subject, not only sidestepping all the pitfalls but accepting the music as its prime charge. The theme is stated in a brief pre-credits interview with guitarist George Benson, whose enthusiasm for Tal Farlow's 'incredibly wild sense of harmony' is followed by Farlow's voice-off murmuring 'I'm not looking to be a star... just to be a participant in some good music.' After the credits, a montage



From left: *Andrina*, Cyril Cusack and Wendy Morgan; *Proust*, Jürgen Arndt, and his housekeeper Céleste, Eva Mattes; Pascale and Bulle Ogier in *Rivette's Le Pont du Nord*; Danièle Delorme as Colette in *La Naissance du jour*; Connie Field's *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter*.

him and whose other-worldly identity is revealed, through the classic device of a timely letter, in a wholly predictable coda. What Forsyth has done, thank goodness, is sweep away most of the Barrie-esque cobwebs infesting the story and concentrate on the guarded intimacy that develops between the visitor and her bemused host. Wendy Morgan's *Andrina* is no whimsical wraith, but a soft-spoken, down-to-earth lass whose ethereality is well disguised by a Marks and Sparks cardigan; and the odd casting of Cyril Cusack as the captain is magnificently vindicated by a characterisation rich in nuance, whether he is distractedly tapping his foot to preposterous rock music from his transistor radio or contending with the most convincing head cold in cinema history. Forsyth is perhaps more at ease with the canny than the uncanny, but it's good to find the talent intact.

Colette wrote *La Naissance du jour* in 1928 when she was fifty-five. Autobiographical like much of her work, it deals with her resigned acknowledgment of oncoming old age, culminating in her decision not only to stand aside when her virile neighbour at St Tropez is drawn to a younger woman but actually to encourage their tentative relationship. Jacques

Demy's adaptation, made for French television in 16mm and widely considered a partial return to form for a very uneven director, is nothing less, in my lonely opinion, than his second-best film (no prizes for guessing the best). Demy's forte has always been his near-infallible justness of tone within narrative frameworks of extreme stylisation (the musical, the fairy-tale), and here his evocation of well-heeled Bohemian hedonism (akin to that of Rohmer's *La Collectionneuse* and *Le Genou de Claire*) proves extraordinarily plausible.

Danièle Delorme, the definitive embodiment of that fanatical lover of animals who nevertheless feasted on red meat and didn't hesitate to swat any insect foolish enough to disturb her at work, seems to have lived her whole life among Colette's cats and gewgaws, her beribboned pug dog and ornamental paperweights. But even more problematic performers like Jean Sorel and Dominique Sanda correspond unerringly to their literary models, the latter in particular conveying to perfection the kind of big healthy girl described by Colette in an unforgettable phrase as giving off 'une odeur de blonde exaspérée'. Demy's camera, flitting from

flower to flower like a butterfly (a live one this time), erotically sensitises everything it lights upon, be it ripe fruit, bronzed bodies, a *salade niçoise* or the act of writing itself. For, though judged by some an irritatingly all-pervasive intrusion, Delorme's voice-off narration plays a crucial role in the film's diegesis: it's almost as if Colette had to savour each glistening new sentence before committing it to paper, so that our perception of what Demy chooses to show us is mediated by the subtle interpenetration of spoken and written texts. And (at the risk of making myself a contender for Pseudos Corner) I should add that an integral part of that narration is the rhythmic scratch-scratch-scratch of her pen-nib across her celebrated blue writing-paper.

A corresponding noise off in Percy Adlon's *Céleste* might be the slight but persistent cough heard from behind the closed doors of Proust's bedroom (whose cork lining did not apparently work both ways). In this, his first feature, Adlon has dramatised a handful of episodes from Céleste Albaret's memoirs of her nine years as the writer's devoted housekeeper. I find it a difficult work to comment on, partly because it's basically an

of newspapers, posters, photographs and record sleeves, superbly cut in lazy counterpoint to a recording by the Red Norvo Trio, and silently telling the story of how Farlow hit the headlines as jazz guitarist extraordinary around 1950, only to disappear from view less than ten years later.

'What ever happened to Tal Farlow?' one of these headlines eventually asks (there is no commentary) over shots of a tranquil riverside community in New Jersey. It is a question which the film in one sense never answers, since Farlow himself insists that he has never been away, merely playing in areas remote from media attention. But as it slips into rapt contemplation of Farlow rehearsing in equally rapt relaxation with his own trio (the camera cutting exclusively by, for and with the music), or delights in watching the maestro swap chords with his admirer Lenny Breau, the film begins to embody an answer in that it becomes privy to 'the sort of musical conversation' which occurs when musicians play for each other, often finding there (as Farlow diffidently suggests) more educated listening than out front. A remarkable film about a remarkable artist, *Talmage Farlow* is as brilliantly crafted as any film in the festival; and it may be worth noting that DeStefano has worked professionally in cinema for nine years as cameraman, assistant director, production manager and editor.

Another object lesson in documentary film-making from Connie Field's *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter*, a fascinating and extremely funny account of the gap between myth and reality in history's tale of how America's house-

wives kept the production lines going in World War Two. The first pertinent fact that emerges is that most of these Rosies were actually working women, receiving a decent wage for the first time in their lives, and cast out into unemployment (rather than back to cosy home-making) to make way for the returning soldiers after the war. The second is that, although feminist by stance, the film is by no means chauvinistic, making no attempt to steamroller over certain awkward hurdles: the fact that one of the women interviewed, gloating over her new-found ability to spend, spend, spend on furs and frivolities, begins to sound like a war profiteer; or the Catch-22 situation whereby temporary replacements and absent incumbents obviously could not expect to hold the same job after the war. This freewheeling candour is all to the film's good, highlighting the justice of its devastatingly witty attack on the mechanisms of manipulation (achieved by intercutting its interview material with some deliriously asinine propaganda culled from *March of Time* newsreels). *Rosie the Riveter* also has winners in all five of the women chosen for interview, earthy, articulate and amazingly free from acrimony.

With George A. Romero's *Knightriders*



The American werewolf, David Naughton.

proving not only a disappointment but tolerably silly, genre movies got off to a poor start. Sticking knights in medieval armour on to motor-bikes, and having them tour the country as a novel form of commune dedicated to staging exhibition jousts instead of tilling the land, must have seemed like a good idea at the time. But as these latter-day Arthurian knights claim to be living according to some mystical code about which the script maintains a baffled silence, the whole thing degenerates into the depressing spectacle of motor-bikes crashing in droves while everybody tries to bash everybody else to bits.

An American Werewolf in London begins much more brightly with two hitchhiking tourists adrift on the Yorkshire moors. Cold and lashing rain; ye old English pub, bristling with hostile stares for the intruders and, just glimpsed on the wall behind three old gaffers crouched over their pints, the faint chalked outlines of a pentangle; an irresistible medley of college-boy wisecracks and lycanthropic howls in the night. The thing that surprises, given the shrill vulgarity hitherto associated with John Landis' comedy style, is the delicacy of his lovingly malicious parody of the English scene. Pinter could hardly have done better for the two men from Scotland Yard, one stumbling mutinously against the brick wall of his junior's class superiority.

But after a truly amazing transformation scene, courtesy of Rick Baker's special effects, shlock gradually begins to assert itself (although no film with the wit to stage its climax to the accompaniment of a soft porn show in the Eros, Piccadilly, deserves to be written off). Given an immensely pleasing presence by David Naughton, who breaks through to a moment of cock-eyed tragedy while

actors' film (with flawless performances from Eva Mattes and Jürgen Arndt), partly because I became so engrossed that I forgot I was supposed to be reviewing it and am therefore without my usual complement of notes. To be sure, certain sequences remain lodged in the memory: a chipper Proust setting off for an evening at the Ritz in the hope of sniffing out some gossip truffles for his *magnum opus*, then returning as if from the front, haggard and forlorn, his protective cottonwool protruding all awry from his once stiff collar; Proust describing in gravely matter-of-fact terms to a stunned and incredulous Céleste the perversions he witnessed through the peephole of a male brothel; Proust hiring a string quartet to play a César Franck sonata for himself and an enchanted Céleste in his drawing-room.

But the heart of the matter should be sought rather in the absence of 'dramatisation', in the covert smiles of complicity exchanged between master and servant, the steamy ritual of his infusions, the unbearably tender gesture with

which she retrieves from his deathbed the last stray pages of his never-quite-completed masterpiece. Or her courteous but firm reluctance ever to address him as 'Marcel'. His equivocal answer 'I don't understand what you mean' to an innocently intended query of hers on the difference between carnal and Platonic love. His wry justification of his exhausting jaunts into the *haut monde*: 'I have no imagination.' The film lasts 107 minutes, of which about 90 (there is on occasion a rather tedious abuse of slow motion and the fish-eye lens) are what Truffaut has called 'privileged moments'.

Penelope Houston has already written sympathetically from Cannes about the work which most impressed me at this festival, Manoel de Oliveira's *Francisca*, a monumental *film-fleuve* detailing the ill-starred infatuation of a pair of Byronic dandies for an English-born beauty, Fanny Owen (the title's 'Francisca'), in nineteenth century Lisbon. I should just like to add two observations. (1) Even from the admittedly incomplete evidence of subtitles, its aphoristic dialogue is of unaccustomed brilliance. (2) Most of us have experienced that unsettling moment in a film when the displacement of characters within the frame begins



Francisca: Teresa Meneses as Fanny Owen.

inexorably to resolve itself into the precise composition of a photogram with which we are familiar from publicity stills—whereupon, as every last gesture and expression knits into place, the narrative seems to be suspended for a split (and subconscious) second. Well, there isn't a single shot of *Francisca* which hasn't been imbued with that same eerie stillness of inevitability.

Through a striking use of tinted photographic back projections recalling those of Syberberg's *Ludwig* and *Karl May*, another Portuguese entry, João Botelho's *Conversa Acabada* (*The Other One*), traces the friendship of Fernando Pessoa and Mario Sa-Carneiro, who together redefined their national literature in the

wistfully appealing for a repetition of the act of love whereby Claude Rains finally puts his son out of his misery in *The Wolf Man*, this werewolf deserves a more imaginative fate than he is awarded.

There was, however, also Ivan Passer's *Cutter's Way*, whose opening sequences, drenched in weary sexuality, darkness, fog, rain and dank despair, come within a hairsbreadth of recreating in colour the authentic feel and flair of 40s noir. Passer has been groping a trifle blindly since his transfer to America a dozen years ago, but here triumphantly recaptures the subtly shaded ambivalences with which he made his Czech début in *Intimate Lighting*. Richard Bone, boyishly disarming (he is played by Jeff Bridges), earns the benefit of the doubt as he is first seen coaxing a handout from the luxurious lady whose bed he has just been sharing, then embarks on a personal voyage to the end of the night as guardian angel to his friend Cutter (John Heard), a horribly mutilated Vietnam veteran given to drunken self-pity and racist invective. Between them is Cutter's wife, evidently nursing guilty feelings for Bone, serving as a kind of moral barometer.

But Bone stumbled across a murder that stormy night. Impulsively identifying the killer—a local bigwig proudly

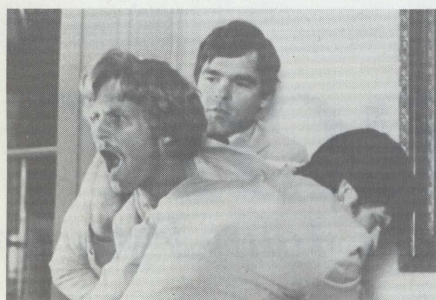
heading the flower carnival on horseback—he subsequently retracts when faced with Cutter's urge to action: it was dark, a split second, he can't be sure. Cutter, blithely ignoring his friend's protests, launches out like a rocket on a private eye adventure which gradually uncovers the dark conspiracy behind one man's domination of the town, simultaneously exposing Bone for the beach bum he is. The barometer, one realises, has been misread, or has somehow shifted. It takes a quixotically suicidal act, as Cutter gallops into the lion's den on a borrowed charger, to bring a shamefaced Bone to the point of action. Only, when he acts, to leave one wondering whether what has been served is in fact justice, or sentiment. Chandlerian in tone, almost Proustian in its ambiguities, *Cutter's Way* suddenly makes one realise the extent to which characters in thrillers are usually cut and dried.

Another Quixote in Jacques Rivette's *Le Pont du Nord*, where Pascale Ogier (daughter of Bulle) ends her pursuit of a phantom paranoia through the wastelands of Paris by slaying a dragon belching industrial flame while its mate calmly demolishes a building nearby. Perhaps closest in style to *Céline and Julie*, the film in fact takes its mood from what Rivette has jokingly described as his decennial plan to bear witness to the trends of paranoia. First *Paris Nous Appartient*, testifying to the aftermath of the Hungarian Revolution; then *Out One: Spectre* as a sequel to the événements of May 1968; and now *Le Pont du Nord*, made on the eve of the French elections in anguished expectation (unfounded, in fact) of no change and no end to the reign of Giscard.

Echoing both the airy magic of *Céline and Julie* and the obsessional claws of *Paris Nous Appartient*, the hypnotic

opening sequences sweep two women (the timidly shrinking Bulle Ogier, the ferociously fantastical Pascale) up into the clutches of a ceaselessly circling or tracking camera which, while associating them with the statues of cherubs and lions that adorn the squares of Paris, shepherds them ever closer together for a trilogy of bizarre encounters. Once may be chance, cries Pascale, twice a coincidence, but three times means Destiny. And destiny, as always for Rivette, signals a strange interchange between fantasy and reality.

The lion and the cherub. Pascale, fearlessly facing the unknown with an array of karate poses, slashing the watching eyes out of identical rows of posters with her knife, is Quixote to the life. Bulle, the chief token of her Sancho Panza role being her periodic tipling, plays an extension of her character as a terrorist in Fassbinder's *The Third Generation*, newly released from jail, suffering agonies of claustrophobia, unable to understand why the lover she has longed for remains persistently elusive. As though conjured by the different fears that animate the two women, each one's phobias leaving the other indifferent, a corpse, a conspiracy, a mysterious map of Paris subdivided into numbered squares. At once, taking a leaf out of the book of *Céline and Julie*, Bulle and Pascale turn the map—and Paris itself—into a Snakes and Ladders board, with certain areas designated as horrible and even mortal hazards. Only to find reality playing the game as well. Impossible in the space available here to chart the ways and means by which Rivette keeps pulling the carpet from under the spectator's feet, meanwhile ringing the changes on his characters, their statuary connotations, and their relevance to reality. But he is, after the near miss of *Merry-Go-Round*, right back on target. □



Jeff Bridges, restrained in *Cutter's Way*.

early decades of this century. Each of them invested the totality of his being in poetry: Pessoa by withdrawing into monkish single-mindedness; Sa-Carneiro by exiling himself to Paris and living out his revolt as publicly as the Dadaists whom he frequented. Each, too, contrived at the shattering of his solitude: Pessoa in the parthenogenesis of one poetic 'heteronym' after another—Caeiro, Campos, Reis, Soares, the splendidly named Alexander Search—all of them as stylistically distinct as possible; Sa-Carneiro in suicide. Their sole contact for many years was by means of incessant letter-writing, and Botelho's strange film is that curiosity, an adaptation of a correspondence.

What a contrast with Mauro Bolognini's jejune version of *La Dame aux Camélias*, in which Dumas' hardy perennial is confronted with the 'reality' of its model, the doomed courtesan Marie Duplessis. Bolognini squanders his one good idea, the casting of Isabelle Huppert (an actress whose talent, so to speak, for wanton yet reticent nudity on the screen ought to have been eminently suited to what one assumes was intended as a demythification of Marguerite Gautier), and proves himself to be one of the



João Botelho's *The Other One*.

foremost 'zoomoholics' of contemporary cinema.

From *La Dame aux Camélias* to 'La Dame aux Aurélias', from Dumas to Duras, whose diptych, *Aurélia Steiner—Melbourne and Aurélia Steiner—Vancouver*, was screened to a very small but very appreciative audience. As it happens, my punning allusion to that other Marguerite is less frivolous than might at first be supposed: Duras' films are *consumptive*, as the word applies to certain Romantic poets for whom poetry was practically a symptom of the disease. *Aurélia Steiner—Melbourne* consists of an ostensibly gratuitous series of leisurely tracking shots beneath the bridges of the Seine, accompanied by the

director's voice reciting a letter written to an unknown lover by the eponymous poetess; *Vancouver* of more static shots (in black and white) of the gritty Normandy coastline with its abandoned German blockhouses, accompanied by another letter to the same correspondent.

'Aurélia Steiner', however, should not be interpreted as a character but as a name, a poetic construct, a 'proper metaphor', as one says 'a proper noun' (like 'Lol V. Stein', 'Nathalie Granger' or 'Véra Baxter'); similarly, the double commentary operates rather as the textualisation of Duras' voice, rendering it inseparable from the utterances to which it gives almost musical expression; as for the Seine, it constitutes the visual transcription of that voice, deep, fluent, inimitable, imperturbable and slightly garrulous. In *Vancouver*, where Duras allows the hint of a real situation to emerge, concerning the death of the poetess's mother and her own birth in a concentration camp near Cracow, its relation to the film's stark imagery might be compared to that between a windswept stretch of beach and the memories by which one is assailed whilst walking one's dog along it. These are beautiful works. □



ALMOST ANARCHY

Afterthoughts on 'Heaven's Gate' from John Pym and

The obituaries of *Heaven's Gate* have been written. The October issue of *Films Illustrated*, which, as I write, has published perhaps the most thoroughgoing and the most vitriolic, adds a ten-year chronology of the mishaps which beset the film and which rebounded on the company and senior executives of United Artists, which channelled money into it and as distributor stood grimly behind it. Nothing can now, after a belated London opening in September and closure in October, be written or said or schemed to salvage this enormous venture, that is nothing can give this much rejigged movie the momentum to recoup the \$36m which UA admit it cost.

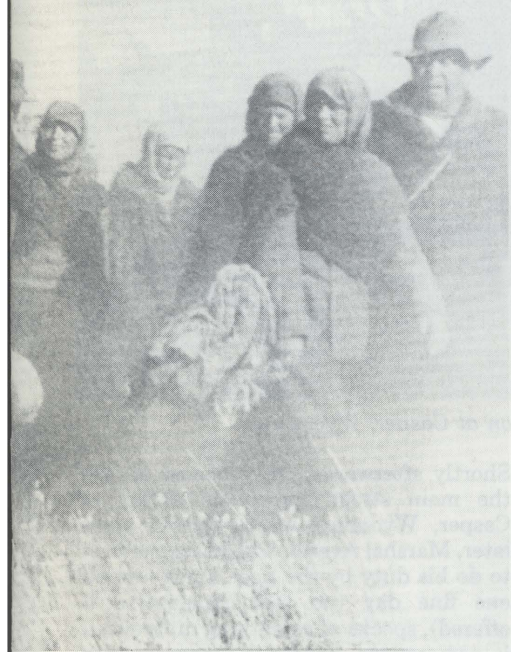
To rehearse once again the step-by-step reasons for the film's fate, first at the hands of its long location schedule and then at the hands of the American press and public, to pick over the bones with morbid curiosity, which Tony Crawley in *Films Illustrated* delights so thoroughly in doing, is an exercise which yields some profit. It indirectly explains why director Larry Cohen (who came to attention with *The Private Files of J. Edgar Hoover*) was taken off *I, the Jury* after only six days' shooting. In New York, he was one day and \$1m over schedule: 'I could not indicate that I would get back on schedule...' And it will explain why, in all probability, more established figures such as Robert Altman, who was lost in the shuffle when

Fox took over his UA project *Lone Star*, will find it increasingly difficult to secure backing from a major Hollywood company when what is at stake relies heavily on the overall creative control of an auteur.

This rehearsal will not reveal, however, what it was about *Heaven's Gate* itself, in both its original version (219 minutes) and its 'preferred' second edition (149 minutes), that made it the subject of such unequivocal condemnation. Some French critics fought a late rearguard action, but this only confirmed the American pundits' belief that it was indeed the sort of tarred Continental art picture, made by an arrogant, inward-looking director, which was death at the real box office. Matters were not always so. *The Deer Hunter*, the second of Michael Cimino's only three films as director, and the first of what may be termed his maturity (*Thunderbolt and Lightfoot* was a smooth contract job but in essence little more), earned two accolades: more than \$54m worldwide, even allowing for inflation a more than acceptable take for a film that, like *Heaven's Gate*, had rocketed over budget; and five Academy Awards, the seal, five times over, of industry 'art'. Some critics might subsequently baulk at Cimino's misrepresentation of the Vietnamese, his wilful fudging of the issues raised by the war, in short his avoidance of making a film which roundly condemned the poli-

cies of successive American administrations immured in the Vietnamese quagmire, his celebration of American tenacity and strength of spirit. But in most important industry respects, *The Deer Hunter* was a resounding, exemplary success. Indeed, it was such a success that, in the course of *Heaven's Gate*'s profligate production difficulties, some at United Artists drew comfort from the fact that this had all happened before, and paid off.

Heaven's Gate, in its second edition, is still unquestionably a flawed work. And it is best, perhaps, to dispose of its shortcomings without more ado. The character who by his sheer ludicrousness seems forever on the point of upsetting the balance of this epic Western, which is at heart a notably straightforward, stripped down, fictionalised account of the Johnson County War between villainous cattlemen and stubborn immigrant farmers in the Wyoming of 1890, is that of William C. Irvine, John Hurt, the marshal of the Harvard Class of '70, who subsequently becomes a maudlin drunk and lily-livered member of the cattlemen's club, the Stock Growers Association. He is in theory, one judges, central to Cimino's moral purpose—the drunk and the man of action are equally at a loss to combat the excesses of buccaneering capitalism—being the antithesis of the film's protagonist, another marshal,



(p 24) *James Ivory*

his friend and Harvard classmate James Averill, the isolated defender of the law in Johnson County.

Irvine's role is the one that appears to have suffered most in the process of re-editing, although whether it ever had any real substance is open to doubt. Crawley reports that Hurt spent six months on location and that in one ten-week period he worked for only a day and a half. Irvine has been reduced to a shadowy, posturing character, mouthing regrets but never given the chance to articulate his point of view. His friendship with Averill must be taken on trust. In the re-edited version's most obviously scissored moment, he advances to the rostrum on Commencement Day 1870 to deliver the oration, an answer, one has been told, to the Reverend Doctor, Joseph Cotten's pious lecture on the duties of privilege, only to be cut off in mid-stride. Furthermore, although Hurt is, and one must again add, in theory at least, perfectly cast as this slack cowardly man, his very Englishness, his intimate and introspective style of performance (to date best displayed in *The Elephant Man*, a film he almost missed due to the delays on *Heaven's Gate*), works against Cimino's open-armed approach.

It is true that *Heaven's Gate* contains, and indeed carries off, intimate scenes, but these—for example, Averill's birthday gift of a horse and carriage to his mistress Ella, after which the pair stand

Top left: Christopher Walken and the settlers. Top to bottom: Kris Kristofferson in the Sweetwater saloon; roller-skating at Heaven's Gate; the immigrants prepare to fight back.

outside her bordello, unconcerned and happy, wrapped in voluminous tasselled bedspreads—for the most part call for old-fashioned star presence, that peculiar ease before the camera. John Hurt, the inheritor of a modest theatrical tradition, lacks it, but Kris Kristofferson, as Marshal Averill, and Isabelle Huppert, the doughty Ella Watson, both have it in ample supply.

The second fundamental flaw in *Heaven's Gate* derives from the fact that the emblematic East European immigrants of Sweetwater, Johnson County, are required in the film's key expository scene to justify themselves. A similar narrative responsibility was not laid on the latter-day immigrant community in *The Deer Hunter*: the great wash of individual, but not individualised, faces in *The Deer Hunter*'s wedding scene was essentially the detailing of a fresco. Cimino regards *The Deer Hunter* and *Heaven's Gate* as a pair, admits to having echoed the wedding scene in the former in the scene of Sunday celebration at Sweetwater's 'Heaven's Gate' dance hall-cum-roller skating rink-cum-town hall. A sense of community values, of exuberance, of making one's own entertainment—improbable as it may seem, the original 'Sweetwater' had two such rinks—is conjured with marvellous lyric effect. But later the trouble comes to a head when these barely identified townspeople, the mayor, the president of the chamber of commerce, the widow Kovach, an itinerant photographer (taking the pictures on which this film would be based), are drawn as it were into the foreground of the painting to explain its argument.

The immigrants en masse are, in a sense, Cimino's subject proper, the put-upon ancestors of the steel-workers of *The Deer Hunter*, whose capacity to endure, although slow to reveal itself, has here been tempered in the fire, even if final victory has been denied them. They register, however, as talkative ciphers, given to gestures—the tearing up of a document, the throwing of dust in the air—which only reinforce the fact that they are not 'real' people in the way that Ella's gaggle of prostitutes, glimpsed going about their business or rudely awakened from a Sunday lie-in, are, however peripherally, 'real' people. It should be said, too, that their adversaries, the members of the Stock Growers Association led by Frank Canton, a cross-cast Sam Waterston, a lowering, precisely spoken but almost pantomime Wicked Man, are little better, that is little more convincing as four-square individuals. They are not, in short, what the critics had come to expect from a director who had extracted such compellingly intense performances from the principals of *The Deer Hunter*.

This, however, is not the whole story. *Heaven's Gate*, for all its picking up and reversal of *The Deer Hunter*'s themes, is in fact, in tone, mood and execution, a very different creature. And it might be added, as far as its left-wing credentials go, *Heaven's Gate*, with its double-dyed capitalist villains, backed up to the hilt by the Governor of Wyoming and, it is



Reconstruction of the station at Casper, Wyoming.

said, the President of the United States, decisively gives the lie to those who claimed its director was a right-wing apologist.

Heaven's Gate is not a 'realist' allegory, more than a faint paradox in view of the fanatical care with which Wyoming life was reconstructed. *The Deer Hunter*, which was such an allegory, was unified by a metaphor, the game of Russian roulette, misinterpreted by many as a literal measure of the extent to which Cimino had traduced the Vietnamese people. *Heaven's Gate* has no metaphors, or at least no such immediate or carefully developed ones. What it does have is a sense of abstract spectacle, and echoes of what may once have been moments of metaphorical dressing. Consider the opening. Averill—young, clean-shaven, breathless—pelts down a street that could not in a thousand years be mistaken for, as a title boldly states, 'Harvard College, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1870'. This is Oxford, England, time deliberately unspecified. Cimino had wanted to film his Harvard prologue on location, but scouting Harvard Yard it became apparent that however carefully he placed his camera some modern excrement was bound to intrude. One authentic corner could be found, but it would have cramped both his vision and Vilmos Zsigmond's Panavision camera. In any event, Harvard had been bitten down the years by some unfortunate cinematic advertisements (the most recent of which, *A Small Circle of Friends*, had also been produced under the aegis of United Artists), and hesitated to give permission for filming.

So, Oxford it was, for a sense not of 1870 but of timeless tradition, learning unsullied by the exigencies of the marketplace. The opening scenes of young men about to leave the gates of paradise, choreographed with a bravado surpassing almost, and in compression certainly, *The Deer Hunter*'s wedding dance, compel the attention of the spectator (and Cimino assumes he will be a knowing, patient spectator) and alert him to prepare for further disruptions.

Shortly afterwards, the immense set for the main street and train station of Casper, Wyoming, where twenty years later, Marshal Averill, who has gone West to do his duty by the poor, finds himself one fine day (no real explanation is offered), speaks of something different: it is new, vulgar, populous, unconstrained by the Oxford/Harvard tradition. It is accurately detailed down to the last stove-pipe hat on the last, least visible extra. But it is also oddly unreal. It draws attention to itself, magnificently. It retrospectively begs the question: Why so much trouble for a single establishing shot of a town that is not seen again?

Who today can see *Heaven's Gate* without some hearsay knowledge of its notorious budget? (And not feel some twinge—of guilt, perhaps—at such expense in such recessionary times?) Well, here is awe-inspiring evidence of how some of that money was spent. The effect is disquieting. Why did Cimino not linger (though perhaps he did, once upon a time), and why did he not exercise his proven gift for letting the action develop out of the atmosphere?

The answer is that taking the film as a whole and to a qualified extent, he does. Caught in and wandering through the film's immense set pieces—literally so in the case of the Casper establishing shot—is the lonely figure of James Averill, 'a victim of his class' (as Billy Irvine says, double-edgedly, of himself). Marooned in the emptiness of the Sweetwater saloon, at the end of which, at some distance from the bar itself, a cockfight is taking place; or in the crowded boarding-house where, cheek by jowl with the immigrants he has been appointed to supervise, he has a small room; or, eventually, stuck on a magnificent yacht off Rhode Island, mourning the loss of his youth, his idealism, his mistress (whom he had lost anyway before she was shot down in an ambush), Averill seems always to be contemplating the transience and sadness of things.

I confess that on a first viewing of the second edition, this sense of the film as



The immigrant swirl and the Sweetwater church.

Averill's half-articulated tragedy did not strike me with any force. The film did seem overwhelmingly muddled; the establishment of who was who, the spatial relationships of places (how far, for example, was Casper from Sweetwater?), why—naggingly, inconsequentially—should Ella be carrying on so conveniently with both Averill and Nate Champion (Christopher Walken), an unlettered gunman anxious to improve himself, employed half-unwillingly by the Stock Growers Association, were all worries that intruded. One had, of course, read of—if not actually read—the slamming delivered by the American critics; one subconsciously expected perhaps, rumour being a great destroyer of reputation, that something might be amiss. The ideal critic should not ideally be influenced by his fellows, but such was the rumpus which preceded the London opening of *Heaven's Gate* that it would be foolish to claim that any British commentator could view the film with wholly unprejudiced eyes.

On a second viewing—with ten fellow patrons at a midweek matinée at the Odeon Haymarket, with copies of the soundtrack album forlornly on sale at the chocolate counter—I revised my opinion. The 'complications' of the plot derive very much from its simplicity. Everything is really remarkably clear, once, like Cimino, one knows what is happening; so clear in fact that the director's cavalier attitude to conventional narrative helping-hands (one hesitates even to imagine how often he must have reviewed the reworked footage) seems comprehensible if not defensible. The narrative ellipses, even the cut as Irvine strides up for the oration, seem in keeping with the tone of the film (we have no free will, events do just occur), if it is regarded as Averill's personal chronicle, from youthful optimism to midlife melancholy.

A sense of just proportion, however, is everything. And ironically, considering the sort of film that *Heaven's Gate* is, what is required is more length not less. Not more time for the commercial action

sequences: and one learns that the film has been turned over to UA's 'Classics' department for a third, down-market re-edit, which will in time produce *The Johnson County War*. But more time for the sidelong revelation of character. There is a scene, for example, which might have been directed by Robert Altman at his most benevolently discursive or come from a contemplative Western such as *Jeremiah Johnson*, in which in Nate's cabin a wolf trapper (Geoffrey Lewis), an interloper in the action, which is pausing before the start of the devastating finale, describes and demonstrates a technique of his trade, how to seize a wolf by the tongue so you won't get bitten.

The story is apropos of nothing in particular (though it could, I suppose, be read as a political moral), but what is fascinating about the sequence is how the trapper's listeners react—particularly Ella, who is preoccupied by other matters, and Nate, who has been anxious to impress her with his home, newly wallpapered with sheets of newspaper. The subtext of their looks, the way in which they sit about, the reasons why they are in the cabin at that particular time, are what hold one's attention. And this has nothing to do with story-telling or politics or, it must regretfully be added, the business of attracting a huge popular audience to pay off an enormous investment.

Similarly, when Averill crosses the Casper set and enters the general store to buy a rifle for the Sweetwater saloon-keeper and is eyed suspiciously in all the packed bustle by the Stock Growers' men who are buying harmonicas, weapons and new suits of clothes (the sense of commerce in action vividly communicates itself, as do the incidents of many other scenes, in splendid isolation), it is the subtext of his scanning look that registers most powerfully, the impossibility of his job when faced with such a mass of seething humanity, none of whom is willing to surrender his 'right' to a living from the ranges.

It is such moments that not so much

spark the film into life, or give it unity, but rather resonate and produce effects of unhurried timelessness at odds with the thrust of the action, the principal part of which covers only a few days and which is in other respects eagerly pushed to its conclusion. The cattlemen's decision to eliminate the 'thieves and anarchists' on their death list is rapidly effected with hardly a moment given over to their preparations. As a result, the plot jerks forward in a way which serves chiefly to bring into clearer focus the incongruity of its quieter moments. The wistfulness of these moments increases the more one perceives how out of place they are. *Heaven's Gate* is monumentally imbalanced: a torso in the sand.

One may detect in the second edition of the film the shadows of a pattern. In the Commencement sequence a carriage circles a quadrangle where circles of waltzing couples are themselves forming a larger circle. A few moments later, the graduates form a number of ever larger circles around an immense tree on the trunk of which, just out of reach, has been nailed a circle of bouquets. A wave of fellow-students break through the circles and a battle ensues as the defenders of the tree attempt vainly to preserve the flowers. At the end of the film, the immigrants sweep out of Sweetwater in another fevered wave and circle the hired guns; next day, Averill, remembering the lessons of his classical education, supervises the building of Roman siege instruments, and then engineers an advance from all sides on the beleaguered gunmen. This time, however, the bouquet is denied him. Help arrives in the form of Frank Canton and the United States Army: a state of 'almost anarchy' prevailing in Johnson County, the gunmen are to be placed under protective custody. Averill sits on the ground beaten into exhaustion; after the flower fight he gripped his bloodied friend Billy Irvine with fevered exultation.

This pattern, which one imagines may have been extended to encompass a double set of contrasts, between Averill and Irvine (duty versus self-interest), and Averill and Champion (breeding versus self-improvement), never decisively imposes itself, nor is the triangular love affair really fleshed out. The unity of *The Deer Hunter*'s theme is missing perhaps because what Cimino is here trying to come to grips with is more abstract: the conflict of values, which lay at the heart of the American Dream, as exemplified by a distant historical incident. *The Deer Hunter* grapples with themes of personal self-renewal by conjuring with an immediate, controversial, shocking historical period. *Heaven's Gate* takes an historical moment and working backwards, as it were, attempts to draw a single personal lesson from it. Both films deal directly with atrocities committed by Americans: the difference is perhaps, in terms of popular and critical response, that no one who watches *Heaven's Gate* has lost a son in Johnson County.

Dress a man in chaps and place him before the camera and nine times out of ten he is required to behave in a given way. Thus, Averill behaves as the

consummate lawman when it comes to saving Ella from the gunmen who have murdered her girls in cold blood and are about to rape and despatch her. Make a serious film about modern warfare, however, and the assumptions about how men behave are less bound by custom. Michael Vronsky throws a grenade into a shelter containing a cowering Vietnamese family: the family is decisively killed. Ella's girls, decoratively laid out, remind one of the Indians whom one used to see so carelessly shot from their horses. There is, when it comes to preparing a film, a significant difference between immersing oneself in 19th century background reading and studying photographs of Wyoming in the 1890s (there was a photographed counterpart to every character in *Heaven's Gate*), and watching hours of actuality footage of Vietnam in the 1960s and early 70s. It is easier, when it comes right down to it, and leaving aside any consideration of directorial intention, to create the illusion of reality when your source material is moving images, live testimony, yesterday's newspapers. The past past always runs the risk of being merely quaint: men in stove-pipe hats rarely look entirely comfortable. □

JAMES IVORY

'What's the name of this movie?'

Seeing a first-run film in the West End can be a trial for someone used to the easy-going ways of New York, where you can walk in off the street any time and sit down where you like. In London there is the bureaucratic ritual of booking and then of being seated firmly in the allotted space by a kind of traffic warden, behind the World's Tallest Man. If you're careless and miscalculate the time of your arrival, or if it's raining and you have nowhere else to wait, there may be quite a lengthy interval of syrupy music as the lights go up and down and curtains swish mightily to and fro and the vendors of ice-cream and candy drag along the aisles with their expensive wares. You may sit through quite a few commercials, too, so that when the house lights dim for the last time you are really feeling very irritable, and the announcements made from on high in tones of a ghastly unctuous gentility make you feel trapped and rebellious.

On the first Saturday afternoon of the West End première of *Heaven's Gate* at the Odeon Haymarket, there was an additional check to having a good time: a security guard was posted at the door, going through the ticket-holders' parcels and bags. This man had been hired to make sure none of us brought any rotten vegetables or eggs into the auditorium in order to throw them at the screen, so bad was advance word on the film. A woman ahead of me said, 'When eggs are so dear,

do you think I'd waste them like that?' Were they serious I wondered, or was this some sick kind of promotional gimmick?

Back in New York, a friend at United Artists screened the film for me, since it was no longer playing anywhere. To get to the screening room, I had to pass down a corridor of corporate offices which were being redecorated. There have been mass firings and resignations in the wake of Trans-America's sale of the company to MGM and, more recently, because of a further shake-up, so perhaps these suites were being got ready for the executives of this new, post-*Heaven's Gate* régime. Michael Cimino's reported antics make him sound more madly imperious than D. W. Griffith, Chaplin, and Doug 'n' Mary all rolled together. He is given credit for destroying what they had wrought. But as you watch his film, you think, Hold on, Wait a minute... For if, in sequence after sequence, you gasp with pleasure and admiration—most people I talked to admitted to that, sometimes rather guardedly, it's true—then why did the pack set off howling after it like that?

Michael Cimino might be said to belong to that class of directors whose nature it is to seduce and beguile by their sheer virtuosity. But even if there are some critics—and we all know there are—whose nature it is like prim virgins to resist such beguilement, there must surely be others open and responsive enough to allow themselves to be swept away by the artistry so generously displayed in *Heaven's Gate*. After all, here is a serious, progressive American film, made on a grand scale, with tremendous verve. Did the majority of American critics feel it was, from the very first shot, a lie and a cheat and a come-on?

I've heard indignant comment on Cimino's lack of fidelity—as, for example, that the Harvard Commencement was shamelessly staged at Oxford and passed off by him in a high-handed way as Cambridge, Massachusetts. But Cimino was expressing an historical truth as well as providing the audience a lot of pleasure (nobody is going to rebuild the old Harvard Yard and the streets of Victorian Cambridge; United Artists' money could be better spent on Casper, Wyoming). The truth he was expressing is that the Class of 1870 felt they were at least the equals of their contemporaries at Oxford, and perhaps even their superiors. Or again, I heard (at Cannes) and read (in United Artists' truly terrifying press book on the film) outraged comment that the war between the Association and the Immigrants was almost entirely concocted by Cimino, and had little basis in fact—that in the Johnson County Wars he drew on, only two people got shot, and so forth. That may be, but the film expresses what a lot of people now feel might well have happened, most certainly did happen, over many decades in one way or another, in many different places in the expanding West; and it is a vast, panoramic vision of all the bloody little feuds that disrupted Western communities in the nineteenth century (and provided movie-makers with so many stories and characters in the twentieth).

Furthermore, it seems to me that few,

if any, directors in this country have better expressed, given form to, the sheer dumb mass, weight, colour and brute energy of the great immigration from Europe. For that matter, who has shown us better the descendants of that migration, stuck in their run-down, cut-off enclaves, as in *The Deer Hunter*? Why did so few Americans respond to the group photograph of the citizens of Sweetwater, Wyoming, that Cimino so strikingly assembled? Perhaps it was all the notoriety of his extravagant movie-making, coming at a time when middle-class people in the United States are more and more wondering how they can send their kids to college, or buy a house, or have an operation, or simply go on a vacation. Like the reports of rich men's ostentatious feasts at the turn of the century, Cimino's efforts to 'get it right' finally filled journalists and public alike with disgust so that it was decided to censure him, and his film.

The whole *Heaven's Gate* affair might be looked at as a morality tale of Greed (on the production side) and Self-Indulgence (on the creative side). The financing party gave lavish encouragement to the creative people in the expectation of vast profits, and then the creative people, knowing full well how producers and financiers waste fortunes on a sybaritic corporate life style and on making junk, thought they were justified in spending vast amounts of money on grandiose personal visions. Greed unsatisfied breeds Vengeance, and *Heaven's Gate* itself became the victim.

Michael Cimino has such a gift for outsize choreographed set-pieces that these sometimes tend to overwhelm the more private scenes. He might have benefited from collaboration with a writer whose involvement with the private and the personal would have given more content to those huge and impressive public scenes. On the other hand, there are film-makers—and Cimino is certainly one of them—whose artistry has the same effect as music and dance to sweep the spectator away so that for a while he doesn't ask for elucidation of a film's issues, and might even regard it as an unwanted distraction from his enjoyment. It is hard to understand the extraordinary outpouring of scorn on these 'clunking set pieties', these 'huge scenes of circular hysteria', as they were described, when Cimino brought the film back after its re-editing.

Perhaps finally it was simply a case of the audience's need for a happy ending. To have the Immigrants' victory snatched away at the last minute by the United States Cavalry, Stars and Stripes flying, and then to have Ella Watson shot dead as she is preparing to leave the Frontier for a better life, might have been the last straw. Maybe if you spend that kind of money, people expect a happy and straightforward conclusion. Only 'little' pictures can afford the luxury of an unhappy and enigmatic ending. When the lights came up at United Artists, a well-dressed middle-aged woman who had come in and sat through the film asked: 'What's the name of this movie?' Was she someone from the new régime who was checking to see what had been put away on the shelf? ■

COPYRIGHT OR

'Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits... Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.'

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 27

'The law does punish man or woman
That steals the goose from off the common.
But lets the greater felon loose
That steals the Common from the goose.'

Anonymous 18th century comment on the enclosures

COPYWRONG?

In the recent television series *Rule Britannia*, James Bellini categorised the British economy as one of high technology feudalism based on the control of information and of land. The ownership of much of that information is of course regulated by the law of copyright. As we move forward into the information age, how and where will the balance be struck between the interests of the owners of copyright and those of the public and the users of copyright works? Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights makes it clear that there is an essential conflict between these two interests, both of which must be protected by society. But as the anonymous eighteenth century commentator saw, the law can be woefully blinkered in its concept of justice. Last summer, the long-awaited Green Paper on the reform of British copyright law was published. It offers a chance to debate how the relations between owners and users of copyright works are to be structured for the next three or four decades.

There are revealing similarities between copyright law and land law in the United Kingdom, although both are areas beset with pitfalls for the non-specialist. For both land and copyright there is no statutory register of title, and in many cases proof of title, if challenged in the courts, can be an exceedingly complicated and expensive business. In both cases there is a presumption that owner-

ship of title gives an absolute control over the use of the property, subject only to rules of public access which are closely specified in law. In the case of land law, these are the enactments concerning rights of way and the registration of common land. In the case of copyright law, they are the provisions written into the copyright act for reporting current affairs, for fair dealing for criticism and review and for research and private

VINCENT PORTER

study. And, of course, there is a term of copyright: some works fall into the public domain fifty years after the author's death; others, such as films, fifty years after the date of publication.

Unlike land law, copyright is almost completely regulated by statute, not by common law. Its philosophy is principally derived from the major international conventions—the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works and the Universal Copyright Convention. Each decade or so, these conventions are revised to extend the protection given to copyright owners as new technologies develop. One of the main thrusts behind the British Green Paper is to extend the protection afforded by British law, so that the Government can fully ratify the Stockholm and Paris texts of the Berne Convention agreed in 1967 and 1971.

The Berne Convention and other associated instruments protecting intellectual property are the benchmarks against which national legislatures set their standards. Their terms condition the cultural life of all the countries of the developed world and a high proportion of those from the developing world. They harmonise the ways in which copyright works may be copied or performed in different countries. But they suffer from some major inadequacies.

First, the Berne Convention conveniently blurs the protection of authors' interests with the protection of copyright works. By so doing, it is able to align the interests of authors with those of the media corporations—book publishers, the record industry, the film and television industries. Differences between them are relegated to debates over individual contracts or to employer/trade union negotiations. The Convention (and apologists for the excesses of copyright law) can adopt a rhetoric and ideology of working for the benefit of the impoverished and isolated author, whereas in reality it benefits in the main the culture industries and those artists who provide the products they need. The Convention is then able to claim that copyright is essentially a human right, and that protection must therefore be accorded to the individual author without the need for statutory deposit or registration of title of the work concerned.

Second, the Berne Convention is based

on a nineteenth century concern with preventing the copying of literary works. This has been extended to cover new technologies, such as films and broadcasting, where the question is one of performance rather than of copying. Indeed, for most people today works which are performed play a more important role than those which are copied, or read. The new technologies, photocopying, audio and video recording, have now given the public the means to make copies of various sorts, though in many cases copyright law continues to classify these acts, and the performance of the works once copied, as being technically illegal. The struggle to find a balance between the interests of the owner of title and the user of a copyright work who has access to a photocopier or a video recorder is a cultural, social and political question, but the nineteenth century rhetoric of the Berne Convention all too often stifles clear and creative thinking when it comes to deciding where the balance lies. In the case of the Government's Green Paper, the very provisions of the Berne Convention limit a realistic analysis of the problems involved.

In effect, in most developed countries, there are two distinct attitudes to the law of copyright. There is an official attitude, predominantly though not exclusively concerned with protecting the interests of copyright owners and limiting, if not eliminating, illegal copying (film piracy or bootleg recording are the pejorative terms). There is also a popular attitude, which celebrates the freedom to use copying technology because of the access it offers to emotional pleasure or intellectual resources. Although the cultural difference is often explained in economic terms, there are other motives at work. The money paid for a pirate video cassette, let alone the cost of a video recorder, is normally far more than the price of a cinema seat; the cost of photocopying an article is often more than the cover price of the book or journal concerned. What recording technology offers people is access and availability and on occasion the pleasure of ownership, not simply a cheaper way of seeing a film or reading a book.

It is against this background that the proposals in the Green Paper must be viewed. Will the law be made more draconian to protect the owners of intellectual property, leading to a major cultural schism such as that which followed the introduction of Prohibition in the United States? Or will a more equitable and acceptable balance be found between the interests at stake? In the field of written works, the questions have been more or less resolved, but with films and television the problems are more profound. They can be looked at under five headings: the question of copyright in old films; the right of access to films held in the National Film Archive; the right of the public to make off-air video recordings; the attitude of the law to film piracy; and the constraints placed by the copyright law on the development of film education.

OLD FILMS

Several submissions to the Whitford Committee on copyright, which reported in 1977, drew attention to the chaotic situation over the copyright of old films, and particularly American films. ('Old films', in this context, means all films which were protected prior to the 1956 Copyright Act.) In many cases there is doubt as to who, if anyone, owns the copyright, or whether the film is or is not in the public domain. Some people have been able to make a lucrative business out of exploiting this situation, by buying up 'rights' whose validity is in contention, preventing the screening of classic films without their consent, and re-releasing their prints at substantial rentals even though many consider that the films may no longer be subject to copyright.

Under the 1956 Act, the copyright of a film runs for fifty years from the date of first publication. It then expires, as do all the constituent rights within the film, although copyright may still exist in, for instance, the play or novel on which the film was based. Under the 1911 Act, however, films were protected as dramatic works in their own right, and in addition the parts making up the film (such as the script, the score and the individual photographs comprising each frame) were all protected separately. In many cases these rights were separately owned. Two suggestions were made to Whitford: that a register should be set up of holders of various titles in old films, and that legislation should be introduced to provide that old films should have only a limited copyright life, which would not exceed fifty years after the 1956 Act. But the antiquated assumptions on which the Berne Convention is based took precedence over common sense. Whitford rejected the first proposal on the grounds that under the Berne Convention the existence of a register cannot be made a condition for the exercise of copyright—though it can under the Universal Copyright Convention, to which the United States subscribes. The second proposal was rejected on the grounds that if all rights were terminated sooner than fifty years after the authors' deaths, this also would conflict with the Berne Convention.

Another problem, which will affect old films from the year 2006 onwards, concerns the copyright of films first published after 1956. Although it is not an infringement of any of the copyrights contained in the film to perform it in public fifty years after its first publication, it is an offence to make copies of it. The Law Society, therefore, proposed that it should be made clear that it is not an offence to copy a post-1956 film once its copyright has expired. Here Whitford took a most curious line, arguing that the Berne Convention permits copyright in a film to be terminated after fifty years but says nothing, for instance, about the

rights of composers or scriptwriters. The position of UK law, Whitford argued, was *already* anomalous with respect to the provisions of the Berne Convention. Yet Whitford did not suggest either that UK law should be brought back into line with Berne or that the Law Society recommendation should be adopted. It was apparently a case of applying Berne Convention provisions strictly when it suited and cutting a few corners when it did not.

The Green Paper makes no mention of the problems surrounding copyright in old films, its authors perhaps taking the view that if such problems are not mentioned they will go away. But if no change is made, one of three things will happen, all of them undesirable. Either the confusion over copyright will mean that old films are not screened, and so younger generations will never see them; or the law will be ignored and films screened in circumstances which are technically illegal; or the only films screened will be those re-released as a commercial venture by entrepreneurs exploiting marginal copyrights of doubtful relevance.

ARCHIVE ACCESS

The tasks of the National Film Archive fall into two distinct but related areas: those of acquiring and preserving copies of films, and of allowing scholars and members of the public access to those films for study. The fact that the United Kingdom is a signatory to the Berne Convention, which does not require statutory deposit for register of title, combined with the high cost of maintaining and running a thoroughgoing film archive, has led the Government to reject the proposal for statutory deposit of films even in the modified form advocated by the Terry Report. Despite the fine disregard that this shows for film culture as opposed to print culture (copies of all books published have of course to go to the six deposit libraries), I suspect that the argument for the statutory deposit of films is at the present time unwinable, on the grounds of cost alone.

There is a related problem, of access by the public to those films of which the Archive holds viewing copies. By the terms of its deposit agreement with donors, the Archive is able to show films to students on its own premises. What is needed here is a provision in the law, similar to the 'fair dealing' exemption, for prints of films held in the Archive to be screened, either in a projection room or on a viewing machine, at a number of specified venues spread throughout the UK. Such an arrangement would ensure that no pirate copies were made, but that public access to the films for purposes of study was possible under controlled conditions.

LEVY ON TAPE

It is the controversy over video recording, in particular the demand of the industry for a levy on the sale of audio and video recorders and blank recording tapes as compensation for 'lost' copyright revenues, that has attracted most attention in the press. Although the video recording of films and television programmes is still technically illegal, it is well known that it is happening all the time. There is virtually no television programme, other than those specially designed for schools, which can be copied legally. Whitford, recognising the problem, proposed a pragmatic solution: there should be a levy on the sale of recorders, though not of blank tape, and educational institutions and others should pay an annual supplementary levy for the right to record off air. The Green Paper, however, takes a different line. In its view, the video recording at present taking place does not damage the commercial interests of copyright owners. Normal practice is to 'time-shift' broadcast programmes so that they can be watched at a more convenient hour. Most people, says the Green Paper, re-use the tapes to record other programmes, so that they do not keep a lot of money tied up in video tapes. Furthermore, the costs of administering a levy system would be such as to outweigh any benefits to copyright owners.

But the battle for the right to record television programmes is not yet won, and there is a strong lobby, particularly from the record industry, for a levy to be introduced when legislation comes before parliament. Although the Government has come down in favour of the right to video record television programmes in the home, it has narrowed the terms of the debate as defined by Whitford, and the role that can be played by the video recorder in education has disappeared from the agenda set by the Green Paper—a point to which I shall return. In the meantime, if the Government's proposals become law, domestic video recording will become legal; and in this respect, at least, copyright law will be brought into line with what happens in the real world.

PIRACY

The major concern for commercial film distributors is the problem of piracy. Thanks to the video recorder and the video camera, it is now possible to make illegal copies of films with great ease, and video copies of some films which are just opening in the West End appear in cir-

culation with amazing speed. While there are few who would support this type of piracy for commercial gain, in the eyes of the law such activities are simply a breach of copyright. Proposed changes in the law, designed to try to defeat the pirates, also extend to what many would regard as trivial or even justifiable infringements of copyright carried out in the pursuit of non-commercial ends such as scholarship, research or education. The tentacles of copyright law stretch into many activities of our daily lives. As a recent court case has shown, a school can be prevented from making photocopies of sheet music for the use of its choir or orchestra. It is these facts which must be borne in mind when considering the new proposals designed to prevent and punish film piracy.

The 1956 Act provides for both civil and criminal remedies for copyright infringement, and both types of action have been used by film distributors. In its Green Paper, the Government makes a clear distinction between the right of the individual to use a video recorder in the privacy of the home and all other types of copyright infringement. The problems of policing, however, are considerable. In the field of civil remedies, the courts have developed the practice of granting what are known as 'Anton Piller' orders. These are orders granted to the plaintiff on an *ex parte* application (i.e. when the defendant is not represented) giving him or her the right to enter the defendant's premises to inspect and/or remove documents and articles alleged to contain evidence of piracy. 'Anton Piller' orders have been severely criticised by defenders of civil liberties and other commentators on legal affairs, and there has been general unease about their scope and application. Although the House of Lords in a recent judgment allowed defendants to invoke the privilege of silence against self-incrimination, even this limited defence has now been removed by the Supreme Court Act. Civil suits suffer from the disadvantage that they are limited in scope and expensive to engage in. Usually the remedies take the form of damages, but these have often been so limited as hardly to deter the pirates. The Green Paper proposes therefore that the penalties for copyright infringement should be amended, and that the courts should be able to award penal damages up to whatever sum they think fit.

Another problem which affects civil actions is the question of proof of title. The current position is that the plaintiff is presumed to own the copyright of the work involved in the case, unless the defendant puts the matter in question. In that case, the plaintiff has to prove ownership. In piracy cases, in fact, the defendant almost always challenges the plaintiff's claim to hold the copyright. The Green Paper therefore proposes that the onus of proof of title will also fall upon the defendant in interlocutory proceedings, provided the court is satisfied that the defendant will be adequately protected for damages. The rationale for this new procedure is that it will simplify

and streamline administration. There are, however, two points to be made about the advisability of switching the burden of proof to the defendant.

First, for all its determination to adhere to the Berne Convention, the Government, in the interests of administrative efficiency, is proposing to ignore the provision in the Convention which rules that the copyright is presumed to belong to the person whose name appears on the film. Second, the implementation of this presumption, in cases where there is genuine doubt as to the ownership of title, as with pre-1956 American films, will enable people with doubtful claims to title to prevent the screening of films which might otherwise be thought to be in the public domain.

The alternative channel for remedying breaches of copyright is, of course, by application of the criminal law. There is regular and close liaison between the police and the security departments of the Society of Film Distributors and the Motion Picture Association of America. The police, however, have publicly stated that efforts to trap film pirates cannot take a high place in their order of priorities. Even so, the Green Paper proposes that a new offence should be introduced, that of possession of an infringing copy in the course of trade, and that the scale of penalties should be increased. The details of these penalties are not spelt out in the Green Paper, but the Whitford Committee proposed a prison sentence for a second or subsequent conviction, and in the absence of other evidence it may be assumed that the Government endorses this recommendation. In addition, the customs authorities are to be given increased powers to seize unauthorised copies of films and videotapes.

The danger is that, via legislation designed to help the film trade to eliminate commercial piracy, the space may be opened up for the courts to stifle growing areas of film culture which are essentially non-commercial. The film trade itself feels that it cannot afford to wait until a fully considered new copyright act is introduced, but wants to press ahead with a private member's bill limited solely to those sections of the Green Paper designed to combat piracy.

FAIR DEALING

Film education stands caught at the crossroads: on the one hand, there are the proposed heavy penalties for piracy; on the other, the failure of the Government to accept Whitford's proposal for a statutory licence scheme for video recording. Education has traditionally held a privileged place in the field of copyright legislation. Sections 6 and 9 of the 1956 Act allow fair dealing with literary, dramatic, musical and artistic works for purposes of research and

private study, criticism and review; and section 41 permits the adaptation of a dramatic, musical or artistic work in the course of instruction where the reproduction is made by a pupil or teacher otherwise than by a duplicating process or as part of the questions to be answered in an examination. Although there are no provisions in the 1956 Act for 'fair dealing' in films and broadcasts, Whitford recommended that the fair dealing provisions should be extended to all categories of works which did not unreasonably prejudice the interests of the copyright owners. The Government has chosen to reject this proposal without discussion. One can only assume that this is at the request of the film trade, who have always taken a most conservative line in these matters.

What the Government has failed to consider, however, is the wider international perspective. If its proposals are carried through, they will not only have the effect of severely curtailing educational activities in film and television study, but they will restrict the ability of educational institutions (and indeed of video cassette producers) to compete in an international market—which is what the Government's current economic orthodoxy requires of them. The provisions of the 1976 Copyright Act of the USA specifically allow exceptions far wider than those proposed by the British Government. Section 107 of the American act allows 'fair use of a copyright work' for 'purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use), scholarship or research.' This freedom will not be available to British educators or to British producers of video cassettes. If the Government's proposals become law in their present form, a video cassette prepared for purposes of teaching or criticism may be legally produced in the USA and imported into this country, but a similar cassette could not be produced in Britain without clearing the copyrights concerned all along the line. Or, to bring the matter closer home, a cassette version of *SIGHT AND SOUND* could be produced in the USA but not in Britain.

There are other anomalies in the educational field. It will, for instance, be legal under the present proposals for a teacher or pupil to video-record a television programme for private study. If the teacher (or pupil) brings that video recording into class to play it as part of a lecture or seminar, then he or she will be in breach of the law. In such a situation, it is not hard to see that the law will be frequently ignored and will fall into disrepute. How serious will the penalties be for those who are caught?

It really is most important for the Government to rethink its attitude towards film culture, and for those involved in its practice to urge the Government to think again. If no changes are made, then the struggles over the use of copyright works in the information age may parallel those that took place in the eighteenth century over the access to land. Until the situation is changed, however, I shall end this article © Vincent Porter 1982. ■

DOUBLE TAKES



Pseudonym

Question: Which directors wrote movie criticism under the pseudonyms (a) Hans Lucas, (b) Ernest Riffe, (c) Quentin Rogers?

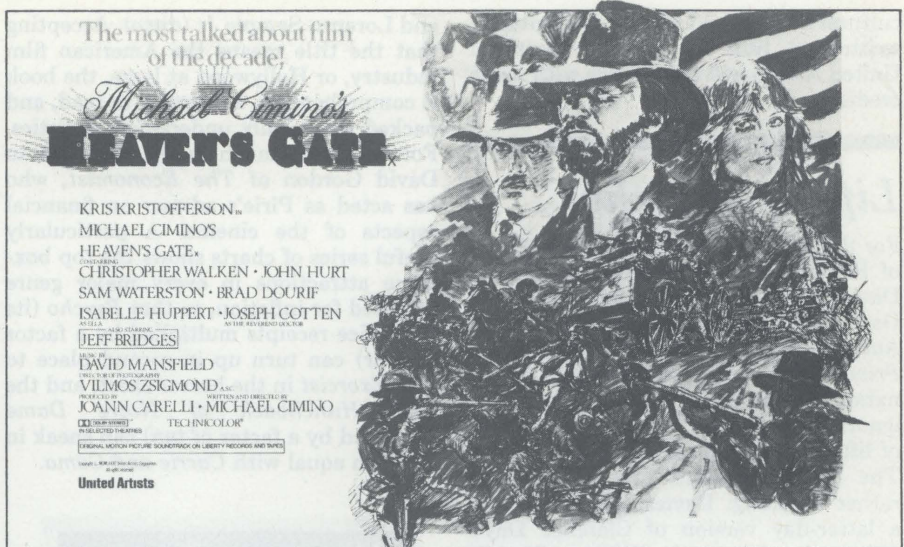
Answer: (a) is Jean-Luc Godard, who used this name for his earliest contributions to *Gazette du Cinéma* and *Cahiers*, and later for minor technical credits on *Une Femme Coquette*. (b) is Ingmar Bergman, who adopted the name to attack his own *Virgin Spring* and *The Devil's Eye* in a special anti-Bergman number of the Swedish film magazine *Chaplin*. (c) is the author of an article in the penultimate issue of *Sequence* (No. 13, 1951, New Year), reviewing a Czech book called *Vitezny Film* (*The Victorious Cinema*), published in 1950.

The copiously illustrated *Vitezny Film* celebrates the thirtieth anniversary of the nationalisation of the Soviet cinema, and anyone who thinks the post-war critical mood was, as they used to say, 'soft on Communism', should read this piece and any other on Eastern European cinema in *Sequence*. Quentin Rogers zeroed in on Pudovkin's introduction to this book, and took apart his bogus definitions of 'Socialist Realism' (good) and 'Formalism' (bad), concepts so vaguely and speciously defined that they could be twisted to fit anything the régime approved or disapproved of. Pudovkin apparently condemned himself through an application of the concepts to the second part of Leonid Lukov's *The Great*

Life. In celebrating the coalminers' heroic contribution to post-war reconstruction, Lukov made the fatal mistake of suggesting that they were rebuilding the industry through the sweat of their brows and with their bare hands (Formalist) rather than with the aid of centrally-provided advanced technology (Socialist Realism). Lukov's film was suppressed from 1946 until 1958 when it was released during the period of the thaw.

Rogers' review used the language and insights of Orwell's recently published 1984 and looked forward to the testimony and documentation of Solzhenitsyn. The piece concludes coolly, and without undue rancour, by stating (and it is among the first essays to make these points) that the major theoreticians of the Soviet cinema had (on the evidence of Pudovkin's apostasy) betrayed themselves, and that little could be expected from the Russian cinema in the immediate future. Though it may not perhaps have struck casual readers of *Sequence* at the time, this brief, modest article is the work of a writer who read Czech, wrote fluent English, and was well informed about the cinema.

Let us now leap forward thirty years, and a clapperboard slams on the Cobb at Lyme Regis revealing one 'K. Q. Rogers' as director of the film-within-a-film of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Why should Karel Reisz have chosen this name? We can be pretty sure he did, because Harold Pinter's published screenplay christens the central performers Anna and Mike, but in the first shot



Left: Karel Reisz, Jeremy Irons and Meryl Streep. Above: missing poster (detail).

merely describes 'A Clapperboard. On it is written: THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN. SCENE 1. TAKE 3'. That 'Quentin Rogers' was Reisz's one-time pseudonym in *Sequence* was vouchsafed to this writer by Alan Brien (himself an occasional contributor to *Sequence*, the occasion in fact being a report on the 1950 Biarritz Festival).

Nobody chooses a pen-name by chance (Orwell was one of three possible pseudonyms that Eric Blair put up to Victor Gollancz, though it subsequently seemed as obvious a choice to his friends as Quincannon seems to mine). Hans Lucas is the German form of Jean-Luc, and also the initials of Henri Langlois. In *Bergman on Bergman*, Ingmar Bergman expressly informed his interrogators thus: 'Ernest Riffe—he's a Frenchman! The name dates from 1949. I was in France with a girl and she had a dreadful longing to go to a fashionable hairdresser called Ernest Riffe. She had very lovely hair, slightly reddish, long and thick. He must have been a pederast. He flung himself on this fantastic womanly head of hair—and cut it all off. I swore I'd be bloodily revenged; and christened my adversary Ernest Riffe.'

Reisz's choice of 'Quentin Rogers' in the first instance possibly came from conflating or eliding his own initials and name with the American war correspondent Quentin Reynolds, who narrated Humphrey Jennings' *Britain Can Take It*. His return to that name so many years later is neither as aggressive as Bergman's adoption of Riffe, nor as simply affectionate as Godard's assumption

of the name Lucas. It represents, one might suggest, his idea of someone mediating between two different cultures, as Fowles does in the novel Reisz was adapting. It might also bring back to him something less definable, that one notes in the final number of *Sequence*, the one Reisz co-edited with Lindsay Anderson. His own major contribution is an essay on Lewis Milestone's war movies, a sensible, well-written piece, bearing a resonant epigraph taken from a book then very recently published and destined to be a modern classic. It is a quotation fit to stand beside the hundred-odd epigraphs that in ironic pairings set the tone for each chapter of Fowles' novel. Reisz's epigraph comes from Lionel Trilling's *The Liberal Imagination*, and reads: 'Ideology is not acquired by thought, but by breathing the haunted air.'

Public relations

One of the few pleasures to relieve the monotonous walk of commuters between the upper Regent Street area of London and Goudge Street underground station is the window displaying future attractions at the Mortimer Street offices of United Artists. Usually there are nine films to be taken in by the tracking shot of passers-by, some with opening and release dates, some tantalisingly described as 'soon'. Certain movies one first heard of in this window (Walter Hill's *The Long Riders*, for example); an occasional film is advertised and then disappears (Demme's *Last Embrace* was featured in Mortimer Street for a year and then pushed out in a double-bill without a press show). Imagine then how boring it was this past autumn suddenly to be confronted with nine identical posters for *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, and nothing else. UA were putting all their eggs in one basket and the same film in every window. Why, one might ask?

If *The French Lieutenant's Woman*

failed, the company could have borne the loss with equanimity. One can think of twenty recent movies costing twice as much that disappeared without trace. And didn't the company worry about overkill? Perhaps not, though the film's associate producer (and publisher of Fowles' novel) Tom Maschler did; he expressed his alarm to several London journalists about the possibility that excessive publicity might produce a critical backlash in the highbrow press.

The real mystery is that concurrently United Artists had another movie on their hands, *Heaven's Gate*, that cost almost forty million dollars. From its initial screening in America in late autumn of 1980, the company showed no faith in the picture, first withdrawing it, then re-issuing a truncated version on American release, as an official entry at Cannes, and in a single small West End cinema in Britain. Word went around that there wasn't even going to be a press show in London, and the invitation to attend the one that was held was couched in apologetic terms for which there is no recent precedent. Expensive embarrassments (*Nightwing*, *The Cannonball Run*, etc) get pushed out without comment or critical exposure, and no one appears to mind.

Most critics slugged *Heaven's Gate* with a peculiar venom. A number, however, wrote of it with immense enthusiasm (Nigel Andrews in the *Financial Times*, Philip French in the *Observer*, Neil Sinyard in the *Sunday Telegraph*). Now when a company wants to promote a movie they scour reviews for whatever favourable comment they can find, even if it means, as was the case with the Rank Organisation's advertisements for their remake of *The Lady Vanishes*, quoting praise of Hitchcock's 1938 picture rather than Anthony Page's 1979 one. Yet United Artists did not buy display advertisement space in any British newspaper or magazine to quote a single favourable review of *Heaven's Gate*. Did they want it to fail then? Are they businessmen? The story of *Heaven's Gate* is a complex chapter of recent

DOUBLE TAKES

cultural history, and when it is eventually written in full, the senior officers of United Artists will not emerge with much credit.

Life with father

For the past couple of years, 0.1 per cent of Britain has been laughing at Hunter Davies' regular *Punch* column 'Father's Day', 0.2 per cent has been laughing at Auberon Waugh's mockery of it in his *Private Eye* diary, and the rest of the nation has remained indifferent to, or ignorant of, Davies' continuing account of life with his teenage daughter Caitlin. The cultural models are obvious and rather touching: Davies sees himself as a latter-day version of Clarence Day's father (in the movie William Powell) from that touching saga of late Victorian New York *Life with Father*, or, like another MGM variation on that theme, Spencer Tracy, indulgent middle-American pop to Elizabeth Taylor in *Father of the Bride*. Everyone in Fleet Street and literary journalism excuses Hunter Davies on the grounds that, in Stephen Potter's Lifemanship phrase, he's 'a damn good journalist' (spoken with three thumps on the saloon bar with clenched fist). If he wants to, well, let him indulge his fantasy of being the William Powell/Spencer Tracy of NW5.

One bridles, however, when in a recent *Punch* column his nostalgic Hollywood ideas impinge upon more recent cinema: 'We were in this Greek restaurant in Camden Town last night... before going to see *The Aviator's Wife*, which was really boring and we walked out in the end, but you have to expect a few duds if you go out to a meal and a film once a week, regardless, which is what we do now, oh we do spoil ourselves, well, you're only middle-aged once...'

Enough is enough. Indulgence can go so far. If Davies cannot recognise from the first reel of *The Aviator's Wife* what manner of thing he's watching, then some honest friend (the kind that once upon a time in the advertisements used to take it upon him or herself to inform people that they had B.O.) should take him aside and suggest that he set down his pen for a while and sit at the feet of Eric Rohmer. There he might learn something of the complexity of teenage life today from someone who was never complacently middle-aged and is now in his 60s.

Anatomy

Quite one of the most useful books on the state of the cinema for years is *Anatomy of the Movies* (Windward, £7.95), edited by David Pirie with contributions from nineteen journalists and personal essays by Robert Evans ('Confessions of a Kid Mogul'), Donald Sutherland ('Reflections of a Star'), Martin Scorsese ('Confessions of a Movie Brat'), Robert Towne (on screenwriting)

and Lorenzo Semple Jr (ditto). Accepting that the title means the American film industry, or Hollywood at large, the book is comprehensive, a pleasure to read, and packed with easily understood statistics. For this last, much credit must go to David Gordon of *The Economist*, who has acted as Pirie's adviser on financial aspects of the cinema. A particularly useful series of charts shows the top box-office attractions in every major genre adjusted for inflation, so that *Psycho* (its box-office receipts multiplied by a factor of four) can turn up in second place to *The Exorcist* in the horror chart, and the 1923 *Hunchback of Notre Dame* (adjusted by a factor of ten) can sneak in as ninth equal with *Carrie* and *Coma*.



Stamp collection

The most pleasant thing to come through my letterbox in recent weeks has been a letter from Sweden pleasingly bearing excess postage (a total of 8 kronor 70 öre) in order to group together five stamps based on stills from classic Swedish films. The last time stamps of this timbre, or *timbres* of this stamp, came my way was back in the mid-1970s when the US post-office issued an attractive rectangular stamp to mark (or so I recall) the centenary of D. W. Griffith's birth. Before that, and since, we've had some colourful stamps celebrating the cinema, but most have come from those exotic countries that produce garish sets in curious shapes that one rarely comes across postmarked through ordinary correspondence.

The largest of the Swedish set, over an inch square, depicts Karin Sylwan cradling the dying Harriet Andersson in the famous pieta from Bergman's *Cries and Whispers* (1972). This is the only colour movie in the set, and the over-insistent flesh-tones and the yellow rose produce an effect reminiscent of a Warhol screen-print. The other stamps from the sound era, both blue-tinted, show Ingrid Bergman and Gösta Ekman in Gustav Molander's *Intermezzo* (1936) and Stig Järel as the sadistic teacher tormenting Alf Kjellin in Sjöberg's *Frenzy* (1944).

The remaining two, executed in an elegant grisaille, celebrate the giants of Swedish silent cinema with scenes from Victor Sjöström's *The Phantom Carriage*

(1920) and Mauritz Stiller's *The Story of Gösta Berling* (1924), a shot of Greta Garbo as Countess Dohna. This last pair are credited at bottom left to one of the key figures of Swedish film history, the great cinematographer Julius Jaenzon. The people credited on the other stamps are presumably the cameramen who took the stills.

It would be interesting to discover what iconic scenes from seventy years of British movie-making could match this numinous Swedish quintet.

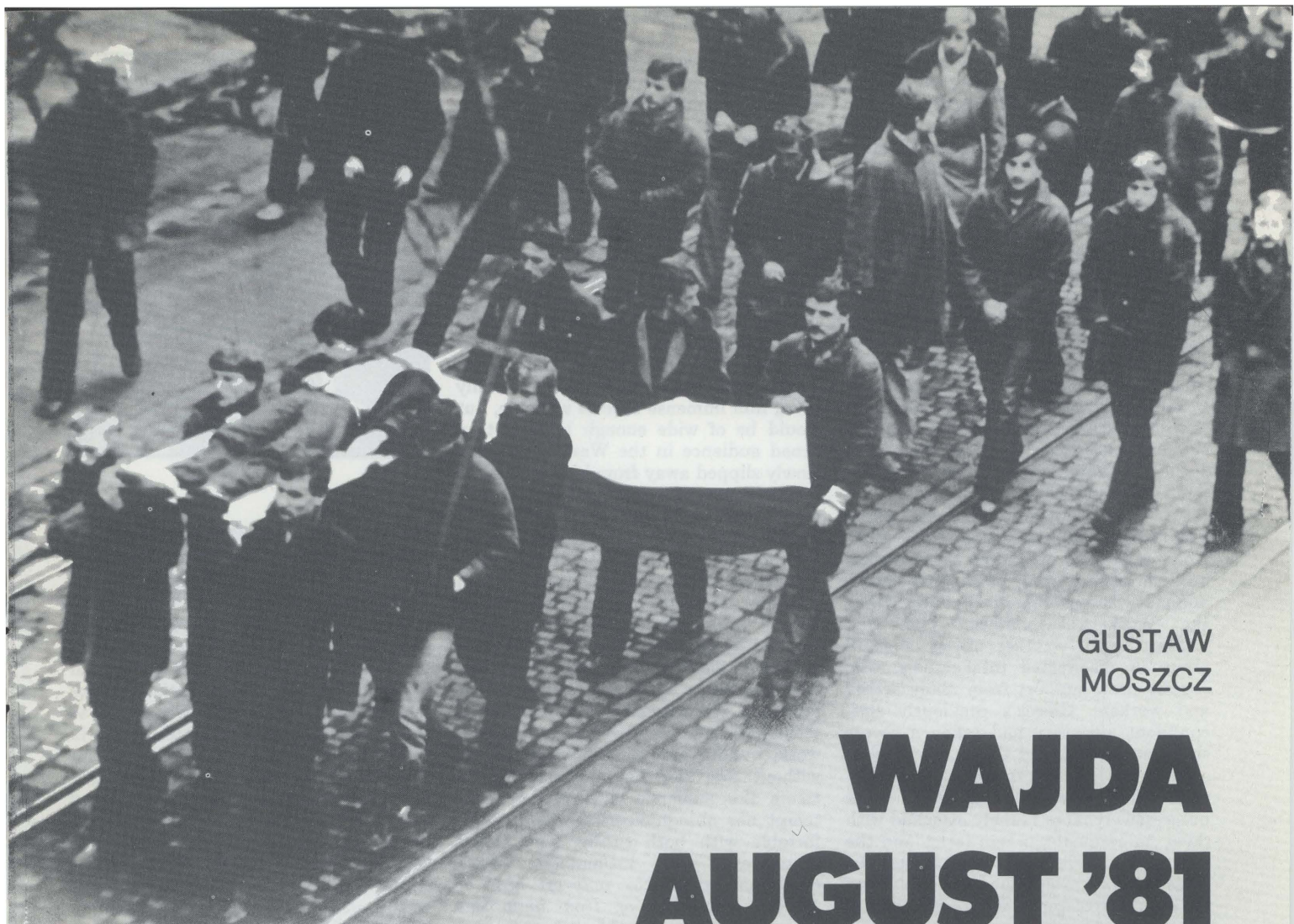
Action Man

Another piece of marginal movie ephemera, somewhat less elevated than the Swedish stamps, came my way this past month. This is *John Wayne Paper Dolls*, a cut-out book designed by Tom Tierney (author of *Marilyn Monroe Paper Dolls*, *Rudolph Valentino Paper Dolls*, and *Movie Stars of the Thirties Paper Dolls*). Here you have the costumes that Wayne wore in thirty-one movies from *The Big Trail* to *The Shootist*, together with a couple of eight-inch high cut-out models of the young and the middle-aged Big John in his long-johns, standing there bashfully, waiting to be clothed in a little brief authority as cavalry officer, Green Beret commander or Roman legionnaire. The dress for *Randy Rides Alone* (1933) includes a guitar and horse; a moustachioed jaw is attached to Captain Nathan Brittles' uniform from *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*. You can dress Duke in the cap and riding mac of *The Quiet Man*, but not in the lounge-suit and trilby of the House Un-American Activities Committee investigator *Big Jim McLain*. I hope someone sent Lindsay Anderson a copy for Christmas. The book is published (Dover and Constable) by arrangement with Wayne Enterprises, and somehow it would seem an act of desecration to set about it with a pair of scissors.

Donkey

In my last column I reported on the British critics who had built theories around Jonathan Demme's use of the late Vince Barnett in *Crazy Mama*, only to discover that Demme was scarcely aware that Barnett had been in the film. Now I have a story about the devoted admirer of Walter Hill who detected a strong influence of Robert Bresson in his oeuvre and significant echoes of *Pickpocket* in *The Driver*. Taking advantage of Hill's presence in London for the opening of *Southern Comfort*, the critic taxed him with this. How conscious was the influence of the French director? 'I haven't seen *Pickpocket*,' Hill replied. 'In fact I don't really know Bresson's work. The only movie of his I've seen is the one about the donkey. Can't remember the title, but I really liked it.'

QUINCANNON



GUSTAW
MOSZCZ

WAJDA AUGUST '81

Adult tastes are often formed in adolescence, and so it was with my interest in Polish cinema, which began with an early viewing of Wajda's *Ashes and Diamonds*. Its downbeat mood, seedy atmosphere, the bitter realism it used to deal with Polish civil war following the defeat of the Nazis, but above all the splendid performance of Zbigniew Cybulski as the trapped, cynical Home Army resistance fighter torn between love and duty, still epitomise for me all that is best in Polish cinema. Twenty-three years later, Wajda has pulled himself out of the relatively uninteresting doldrums of the 1970s, when few of his films captured much international attention, and with *Man of Iron* has achieved not only wide esteem, but a revitalisation of his cinema.

Wajda has arrived at his pre-eminent position within Polish cinema not simply through having more successful features to his credit than any of his colleagues. It is as much a result of the tireless, unpublicised, and frequently courageous efforts he has put into developing and defending the Polish film industry against financial and political constraints. Since 1977 he has presided over the Polish Film Makers' Union, and has given teeth to an organisation that previously did little more than try to avoid trouble with the Ministry of Culture and the Politburo. He spends considerable time in the theatre, directing a wide range of plays. Added to this, he is artistic director of *Zespol X*, Poland's leading film unit.

Wajda's career reflects, to a degree, the

'His theatrical and film output and the interviews he gives demonstrate that, in ideological and political terms, he is not with us. He takes the stand, often met with in artists, of an "impartial judge" of the history of our days*.'

tribulations involved in trying to make films in a state controlled by a relatively weakened political system that is mistakenly viewed in the West as monolithic and totalitarian. Paradoxically, Polish culture, especially cinema and literature, has flourished during the last decade, despite there being a theoretical monopoly of power, and consequently the first question that springs to mind is how exactly the relationship between state authorities and cultural production has worked. East European cinema has learnt to survive in two basic ways: either producing quantities of officially approved films that steer clear of 'difficult' themes, or furiously exploiting the cinema's capacity for symbolism, allusion, veiled reference and ironic understatement, to the frequent bewilderment of Western audiences. Thus we had the somewhat bizarre spectacle in mid-1981 of one of the Soviet Union's foremost directors, Andrei Tarkovsky, visiting London at the time of the release of his latest movie, *Stalker*, a film redolent with opportunities for critics to draw comparisons between its message and the state of the

Soviet Union today—yet Tarkovsky himself bent backwards to deny any political inspiration for his film, an assertion which was difficult to swallow.

Wajda opted for the second route, and made film after film during the 60s and 70s, trying (and sometimes failing) to comment on contemporary Poland through reference to the past, or through tracking the life of individuals who never quite explicitly attacked the system under which they suffered. After the slaughter of workers on the Baltic coast in 1970, the Polish régime altered personalities and styles, and the Gierek era inaugurated subtle changes in the relationship between state and cinema. Before Gierek, the situation was fairly clear—so long as films had not a whiff of

*This reference to Wajda is taken from the so-called 'Black Book' of rules employed by the Censor's Office in Poland. The book, a set of guidelines, was smuggled to Sweden by an official working in the office in 1977. Translated extracts, from which I quote, are available in *Index on Censorship*, July/August 1978. It's not yet clear if the book is still in use, or has been replaced by an 'updated' version.

anti-state material, the authorities were happy to permit their existence, even if directors never actually received much praise for their work. Early on, Gierek's government attempted to present a more liberal-cosmopolitan face to the West, as part of a package to induce massive foreign loans for extremely rash industrial capital development. Censorship never actually died away, but a period of progressive relaxation began, in which artists in all fields came to practise 'self-censorship', sensing for themselves the limits beyond which they could not step. Apart from the obvious prohibition of extremely sensitive topics, such as Polish-Soviet relations, artists were subject to what might be termed 'censorship behind closed doors', in which their work would be tampered with for unknown, unrevealed and often absurd reasons.

A crucial change in the atmosphere surrounding cinema dates from 1976, when in the city of Radom major strikes and rioting occurred, with some deaths and many imprisonments. Following this, the Workers' Committee for Self Defence, KOR, was set up by a small group of disaffected intellectuals, who rapidly drew support from many artists and workers. Gierek's previously self-confident authority had taken a severe shock at Radom, and the rash of underground periodicals, meetings, organisations that sprang up in 1977 were progressively more harshly attacked with fines, harassments, prison terms and the like, including in some cases mysterious assassinations. Gierek had come to power on promises of material prosperity, but as the 'propaganda of wealthy optimism' gave way to bitter realisation of the emptiness of the promises, greater tension appeared, gathered strength, and the régime began to waver, with more pronouncements against its critics and more frequent expulsions of leading figures from high office.

The fundamental explanation for the growing self-assertiveness of Polish cinema in the late 70s is not that individual directors such as Wajda, Zanussi or Kieslowski became more courageous, though that is true. The political régime, which had come to power on the coffins of murdered workers and promises that this could not happen again, relaxed its grip on cultural matters. The minority of those working in Polish cinema who sought more than simply comfortable lives exploited this to make movies which pushed ever further the limits which they knew constrained free expression. The Radom riots established that not only was the régime once again bereft of mass support, but also that it was possible to undermine the already tottering ideological scaffolding which supported the authorities. The precise explanation of why so many anti-government movies could be made, subdued though many of them may be, is given sharp focus by A. J. Liehm in *Index on Censorship*, August 1981. 'Whenever the state ... does not know exactly where it stands, what is going to happen tomorrow, that is in moments of political, economic and social crisis and periods of uncertainty ... the film-makers are in charge, and their art flourishes to an astonishing

extent.' This is the situation which prevailed, and still does at the time of writing, in Poland in the late 70s.

1977 saw the completion of a 14-year-old script which Wajda had been mulling over, unable until then to obtain permission for shooting. *Man of Marble* was the result, and it signalled a turn in the director's career. He capped it with the equally aggressive *Rough Treatment* (1978), and confirmed his return to emotionally decisive themes of tremendous social consequence. But not until *Man of Iron*, in 1981, did Wajda find script, subject and theme which would not only bring him immense success at home, but would be of wide enough interest to a broad audience in the West, which had slowly slipped away from him during the series of previous films, many of which were either so esoteric or so rooted in Polish affairs that they lacked interest for foreign audiences. Into an otherwise conventional technique depending on familiar narrative structures, Wajda inserts values which have either been scorned by cinema's avant-garde theoreticians or ignored by a commercial cinema thriving on a diet of sexual or violent fantasies. His commitments in terms of technique are to unobtrusive camera-work, quality acting, and visual clarity without prettification or fussiness. He treats the audience with neither contempt nor obsequiousness, and is comfortable with both thriller-type action sequences and intimately subtle emotional scenes. Not only are *Man of Marble* and *Man of Iron* important films in their own right, but they also pose interesting questions concerning the relationship of politics-cinema-audience, without laboriously dwelling on secondary issues.

In the context of a degenerating political system which encouraged nepotism rather than intelligence, Wajda's cinema was one of the last bastions of hope, honesty, integrity and genuine democratic ideals. For those of us depressed by a seemingly endless trail of movies dependent on visceral pleasures aimed at the titillation of jaded emotions, his example is a positive relief. His films captivated Polish audiences through their ability to summarise and encapsulate the Byzantine complexities of the Polish state, vivid visual statements of the social malaise. Increasingly, they became vehicles for dramatic analysis of the collapse of social morality, destroying the lives of private, impotent individuals. It is interesting to note that Wajda has consistently been interested in observing the struggle of a central character who is neither morally despicable nor particularly heroic, yet is forced to criticise the political authoritarianism overshadowing life itself.

Man of Iron is Wajda's avowal of confidence in the ability of the ordinary Polish citizen to overcome a repressive political régime. The precarious survival of Solidarity may well have taken serious form by the time this appears. What this interview offers therefore are Wajda's views of August 1981, which may well have altered in the light of fresh developments.



Andrzej Wajda

***Man of Marble* and *Man of Iron* form a sequence. How did the earlier film originate and do you think we shall see another trilogy, with a third 'Man' film?**

WAJDA: *Man of Marble* originated as a collective idea. At that time I worked in the film unit headed by Jerzy Bosak, and it was his idea. In a conversation he once told the story of a man who came to Nowa Huta, the enormous steel-works in Katowice, to find a job. It turned out that he was a bricklayer. He was told that everything needing building had been completed, so he went away. When he had left, someone remembered that this man had once been a Stakhanovite celebrity at the time the foundry was constructed in the 1950s. But the man had already disappeared. This was in 1960.

Aleksander Scibor-Rylski, who wrote the eventual screenplay for both *Man of Marble* and *Man of Iron*, was at that time interested in the biographies of these ex-Stakhanovites, who had had their pictures displayed on walls and been given temporary acclaim, then vanished. He worked on the idea, and I contributed the suggestion of threading the story together by using a girl film student who is working on her graduation piece. Scibor-Rylski wrote an excellent script in the early 60s, but the film was constantly delayed and rejected because, as the authorities explained to us, competition in production was a splendid idea, nothing better had been devised to increase output, so it would be harmful to the national economy to attack it in our film.

For years we approached the authorities for permission to begin the film, and were rebuffed with the same argument. Obsessively I asked for permission every other year or so, because I thought it really was an outstanding script, from the point of view of cinematic art as well as the theme. I also thought the subject would deeply interest young people in Poland. I thought that the further the 50s receded from memory, the greater the interest young people would have in what things were like then, what their parents were doing. They heard some things about that time, about a figure named Stalin, about some repressions, that people mysteriously disappeared from home, and that times were then so

bad. So I molested the Ministry of Culture from 1961 to 1974, when I finally began to work on the film.

No, I don't think there will be a sequel to *Man of Iron*. It's always dubious, from the artistic standpoint, to pursue a project since there may well be non-artistic motives for doing so. And actually I don't see any important events which would provide a sequel. The two films are closely tied to life and death—*Man of Iron* was made partly because I then had the chance to show in that film some things I wanted to put into *Man of Marble*, especially the events surrounding Birkut's death.

You have chosen to stay with the same team for both 'Man' films. Was there a particular reason for doing so?

We made *Man of Marble* together, and the later film is a continuation not only of a theme but also of our own lives. Marian Opania was introduced in *Man of Iron*, and we had some trouble with formulating this character that he plays, of the corrupt journalist Winkiel. Opania is, I would say, a peculiar actor, who plays much in the manner of American actors of the 50s, of Elia Kazan's school of actors, performing as if they have difficulties in delivering their lines, distracted from the task in hand. He manages, in the film, to express volumes about his personality without saying very much, which saved considerable time that would otherwise have been used explaining that he is under stress, that he is scared, and so on. He constructed this character and enabled us, through his performance, to state very briefly the nature of this person Winkiel.*

How much assistance did you have from Solidarity in shooting *Man of Iron*?

They couldn't help as much as they wanted to. Because the film was being shot in winter and it was set in the previous summer, it was clear from the start that there would be no way of making mass crowd scenes. We couldn't wait till the summer of 1981 to make the film, it had to be completed as soon as possible—imagine trying to make it now! Solidarity helped us to recreate the hall in which the agreement was signed, but their largest contribution was simply their overwhelming desire to have the film made at all. The union itself didn't take any part in the actual production. We took documentary material from *Workers '80*, from Engler's TV film *August '80*, and from material shot by foreign correspondents. I also used footage from the Polish newsreel archives of 1970, and I was given free use of all that footage which I saw. *Man of Iron* cost around 16 million zlotys, which is extremely cheap; some of the films recently produced in Poland are up around the 100 million mark.

How do you explain the fact that, despite living in a totalitarian society, you manage to create films which bring into

question the very society that sponsors them? Some critics might even suggest that too much compromise was made by the Polish film industry, at least at some stages since the war.

If I heard such opinions, I would say that these people knew nothing, understood nothing of what is going on in Poland. It isn't quite true that we have had a totalitarian society here. In making our films we never crossed the border between what was legal and what wasn't. It is impossible to make movies in an underground conspiracy, and we made films which we felt were socially in demand, but completely legally. You must remember that before a film can be made here it has to pass through the Ministry of Culture, and receive official permission, and in a sense not only the directors of movies, but many cultural activists and even politicians wanted these films to be made.

Because we made these movies completely legally we naturally never became targets of attack or harassment from the security services. The films themselves frequently were completely unacceptable to the authorities, and this was sometimes a definite tactic, to have sufficient foresight to plan a film which could not easily be cut, a sentence here, a scene there, but which would be intolerable to the censor as a whole. If you make a film which has only a few scenes which are unacceptable then naturally it can be censored very easily. With the result that many whole films were simply shelved. In *Man of Marble*, for example, I cut the scene showing Birkut's death, on the advice of friends who persuaded me that otherwise the whole film would have been stopped. I removed it because I felt that it was not anything of *decisive* importance for the film.

We were able to make such films because we constantly pressed home our demands, speaking of the social demand for such films and of our duty to meet this demand. It was very important that the vast majority of the film milieu was behind this pressure, it was a fairly united effort.

One of your films which has not received wide distribution is *Dead Class*, the film of Tadeusz Kantor's astonishing play. Kantor is considered one of Poland's finest living dramatists, and the film itself is extremely interesting. What has happened to it?

I made *Dead Class* for Polish TV but when the TV officials saw the final version they assessed it as too shocking for television. Nevertheless it's sometimes shown in various locations in Poland, and has been sold abroad. Kantor was happy for it to be filmed, but when it was finished felt that the film competed with the drama, as a spectacle itself, not necessarily artistically. But in any case I think the film's significance grows yearly because one day there will no longer be a live performance of *Dead Class* and the film will remain the only document left. I think the strongest point of the film is Kantor himself, his behaviour, his face. My part was limited simply to pointing the camera, registering the performance, and I made it because I so admire the

spectacle, the play, which is definitely one of the best I've seen.

***Man of Iron* did not receive universal acclaim in Poland itself—one of Poland's leading film critics was particularly harsh on the artistic unity of the film, disliking the flashback sequences. And Walesa suggested that it was too radical. How do you react to these views?**

I've read the criticism you mention, and I think the critic in question systematically makes the same error—he tries to be original at all costs. Back in 1958 he wrote a review of *Ashes and Diamonds*, and titled the review 'Café of Tight Jeans', and this gives you an idea of his originality. The whole review was based on the criticism that Cybulski in that film wore tight jeans (which at the time were symbolic of a Western-oriented intellectual), and that such trousers had not been the fashion during the war, when the film was set. With Walesa I suppose he wanted to say something about the film but was unable to put it precisely. I know how people in Poland reacted to the film, and that's what I pay attention to, since I watched them crying spontaneously at some points, and I don't need any further critical reviews.

Having at last attracted major attention in the West with *Man of Iron*, do you now think you will be working abroad more often?†

I have tried several times to make films in the West but these were never my best achievements. My strength is based in Poland, where I've tried for many years to understand the country, and have a superb team behind me. When I go abroad I leave behind everything that supports me, I'm just one of thousands of directors, whereas in Poland my standing is the result of twenty years' work. However, I am engaged in a Gaumont production in France, with a French-Polish cast, and the film is based on a little-known play from the 1920s by Joanna Przybyszewska, *Sprawa Dantona* (*The Danton Affair*). It's a film on the French Revolution. I'm not getting rid of my staff nor my beloved actors in this production, and this seems to me the healthiest way of entering the Western market.

***Man of Iron* has attracted much attention in the West, but do you anticipate being able to distribute it to the rest of Eastern Europe?**

I really don't know if that will happen. *Man of Marble* was shown in Hungary and had very favourable reviews. But the Hungarians have made films about the 1950s which are much sharper than *Man of Marble*. While we're talking about the film, I'd like to emphasise that without Scibor-Rylski's script, the whole film would not have been anything like as dramatically successful as it is. He invented the central character, Winkiel. Without his script the film would never have been accomplished. ■

*Originally Marian Opania was cast for a smaller role in *Man of Iron*. Opania is not known for 'serious' roles, but has played in children's films, or had bit parts in minor thrillers.

†Wajda's previous foreign ventures included the abortive *Gates of Paradise*, shot in Yugoslavia in 1965, and the interesting *The Shadow Line*, a Thames TV co-production made in 1975.

New directions in British film-making? Robert Brown reports on Peter Greenaway's *The Draughtsman's Contract* (the BFI's most ambitious project), a conundrum played out in a Jacobean country house; and John Pym on Chris Petit's *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (Boyd's Co), an adaptation of P. D. James' novel about the initiation of a tenaciously innocent detective.

Greenaway's Contract

Robert Brown

Even by Peter Greenaway's eclectic standards, *The Draughtsman's Contract*, at first reading of the script, might appear to lie right outside the main concerns of his earlier work. Set in the last decade of the 17th century, the film deals with the relations of a topographical artist and his wealthy patroness. A plot of intrigue and murder, reminiscent of Restoration tragedy, provides a strong dramatic perspective to the artist's contemplation of the peculiarly English landscape of the country house. One might have thought that such a theatrical framework would have been anathema to a film-maker whose previous eighteen films, the first made in 1966, at the age of 24, have all been constructed in the form of either documents about fictions or fictions about documents.

With Greenaway, however, nothing is quite what it seems, and a visit to Groombridge Place, a handsome Jacobean country house near Tunbridge Wells, helped to clarify the picture. There, in panoramic wide-shot for the 1:1.66 Super 16mm format, I watched Janet Suzman, Anthony Higgins and Anne Louise Lambert as they strutted round the grounds, rivalling the resident peacocks in their resplendent but extraordinary costumes and wigs. And I listened as the first ever Greenaway performers to talk to each other declaimed their literate but artificial lines. It became apparent that the elaborate devices of the period film themselves instituted the formal conceits within which the film-maker has always liked to place his own highly personal preoccupations.

'I just think it is a logical progression from what I have done before,' Greenaway said. 'I've been given a sufficiently



'The Draughtsman's Contract'.

larger budget to expand some of the ideas I have been working through, and that suggests that we have come to a time when I begin to use "actors". The dialogue is deliberately artificial, somewhat declamatory and not particularly conversational. So, in that respect, it still has some of my earlier formalist-structuralist concerns.'

All the same, Greenaway admits that there is probably a considerable jump between his last film, *The Falls*, and *The Draughtsman's Contract*. Although there are close visual parallels with *Vertical Features Remake*, *The Draughtsman's Contract* may finally be most remarkable for its detailed portrayal of an obsessively fastidious draughtsman at work. Watching Greenaway's gently precise direction of cast and crew, it was no surprise to learn that the main character, Mr Neville, is intended, in the manner, if not the matter, of a self-portrait, as an English landscape artist torn between drawing what he sees or drawing what he knows. Indeed, the drama of Mr Neville's enterprise accurately reflects the internal dynamic of all Greenaway's work, that tension between the Romantic inclination of the painter trained at art school and the Materialist discipline of the documentary film editor once employed by the Central Office of Information.

'It's my particular problem,' Greenaway said, 'especially exemplified in the film I remain most fond of, *Vertical Features Remake*, this balance between a rigid extra-frame consideration of film-making and a very English romantic concern with visual imagery. There is this romance and structure battling all the time.' The deep attachment to domestic landscape, a literary turn of mind and the learnt procedures of structuring an often arbitrary selection of footage are the foundations of that ironic contradiction, central to Greenaway's work, between the Romantic author of a fiction and the Structuralist fiction of an author.

The plot of *The Draughtsman's Contract* hinges on the inclusion or exclusion of certain objects within the artist's drawings, an issue which comes to relate directly to the wider question of whose authority and desires really lie behind the draughtsman's contract. 'The film is essentially about a draughtsman drawing a landscape,' Greenaway said, 'and the facets of the drawing and the landscape are compared on another level of representation, the film. I want those three ideas to be present in the whole structure of the movie, so that one is aware that we are making comparisons all the time between the real landscape, Mr Neville's image of it and, ultimately, us as viewers seeing those ideas represented on film.'

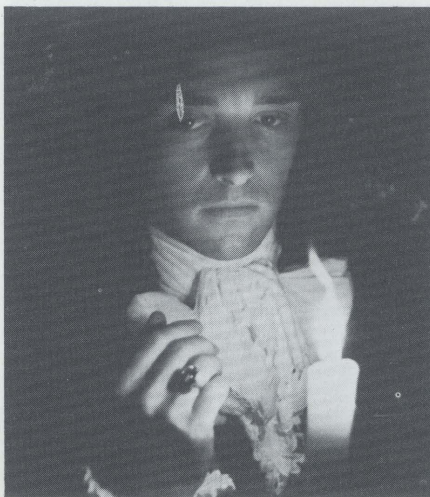
Underlying these words is a wry recognition of the essential arbitrariness of the relationship between the living author and the inanimate world of his creations, between the world of subjects and of objects. It is this largely intuitive recognition that chiefly prevents the internal collapse of Greenaway's dizzying Towers of Babel, and not his own professed interests and influences, whether the Romantic love of English

landscape or the formalist fascination with Borgesian theorems.

'One difference about *The Draughtsman's Contract* is that all my previous movies, by and large, have not been overscripted. They have developed very much in the editing process. There's been Idea A. Wouldn't Idea A look good with Idea B? And then A and B produce C, and so on. Now, because of the money and structures involved, and the disciplines necessary with actors, this film had to be scripted quite closely, and that I have never done before. The text became a written object before it became a filmed object.' No longer, perhaps, will the previous excesses of narrative content and methods of representation be used for the wilfully obscurantist ends of building heretical systems of classification, only then to laugh in the face of their hopeless inadequacy. Rather they may serve to raise more directly that question of authorship which lies at the heart of all Greenaway's films and which places him within, not just an English tradition of landscape art, but the international centre of avant-garde film.

In Greenaway's early shorts, either the images insist on the ghostlike presence of an author while the commentary ridicules the notion, or vice versa. Image and narration often seem arbitrarily related. In *Water Wickets*, shots of water in all its liquid patterns and under every light are laid over a narrated fictional history which approximates a very Unseen translation of Caesar's Gallic Wars. *Dear Phone* effectively attempts a visual record of all the telephone boxes in England, at every time of day and in every shape of place, while the soundtrack relates a rare collection of eccentric phone calls. *Windows* also pretends to be a taxonomy of the world: windows are a visual leitmotif for a collation of fictional suicide statistics. *H Is for House* is a home movie (one domestic set-up is used) which has been overlaid with a haphazardly spiralling lexicon. The author's home, perhaps, represents the world: the scenes of his daily life must stand for an outside world which remains a mere concept, a language, a lexicon.

The feature-length *A Walk Through H*

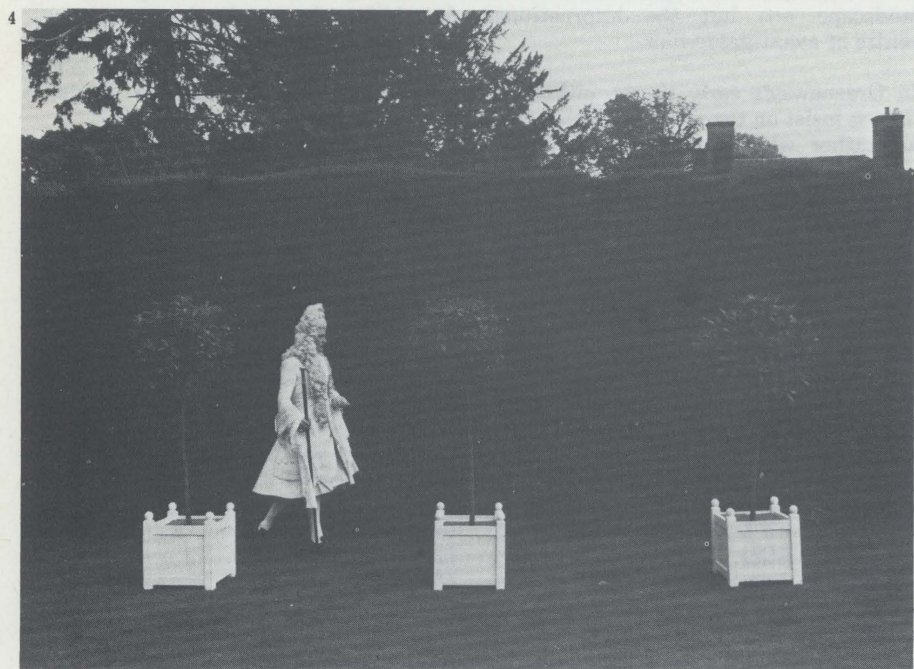


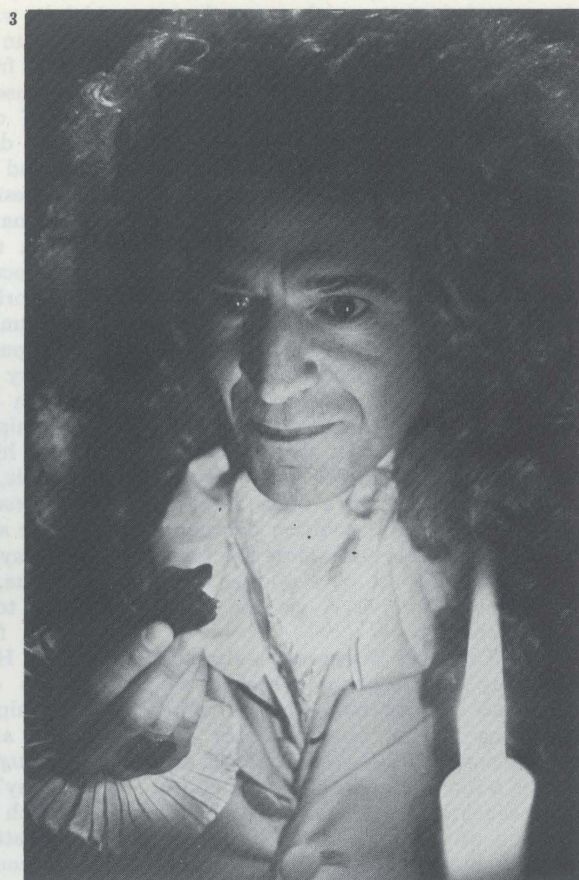
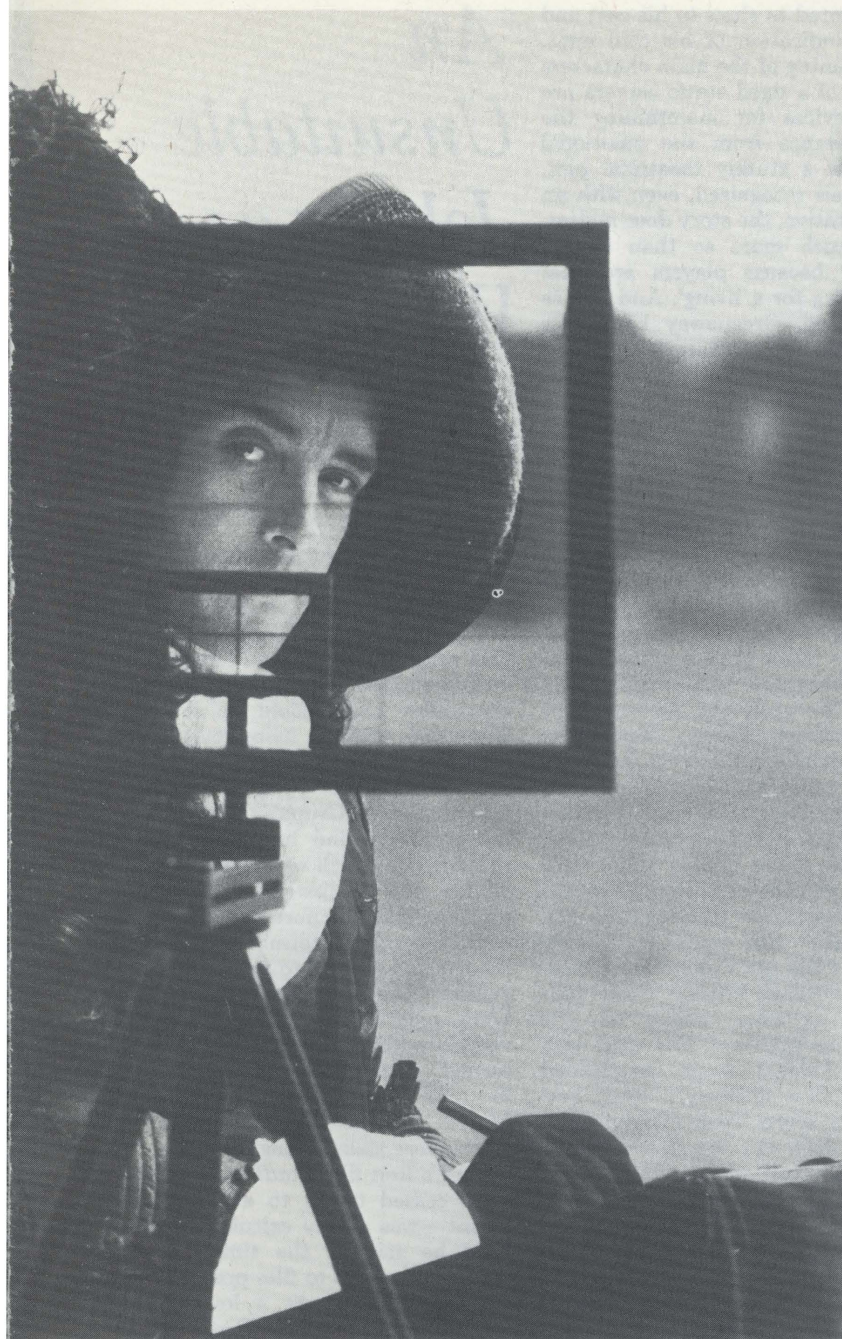
Anthony Higgins as the draughtsman.

and *Vertical Features Remake*, both released in 1978, bear the more noticeable marks of a strangely haunting obsession with the passage of time and space. In *A Walk Through H*, fictional map drawings evaporate into a single meaningless symbol either just before or just after the narrator reaches their place-scale. In *Vertical Features*, one of the most beautiful films of the last decade and Greenaway's most considerable work, the interest in the film's time-scale is brilliantly matched to the director's own sense of place. Real places, not just artefacts, vanish before they can really be seen or, in Greenaway's terms, known. The 'vertical features' are choreographed with Michael Nyman's pulsing chords in three separate dimensions of landscape. They are born with the light of dawn, live during the day, decay in the dusk and are resurrected again in any and every order that they may ascend into eternity with the last frame of film. 'None of these objects was ever manipulated,' Greenaway has said. 'Everything was found.' In other words, the central question the film implicitly addresses is: How can an author reconcile his own time and space with those of his fictional representations?

Greenaway has approached this question not theoretically but through practice and intuition. And perhaps his work can best be 'known' if it is compared to that of the avant-garde film-maker Raul Ruiz for whom the matter of the relationship between the author and his subjects, both documentary and fictional, provides a basic conceptual premise. The apparent antithesis of Greenaway, Ruiz is a highly political and theoretical film-maker. Like *A Walk Through H*, Ruiz's *Snakes and Ladders* is about a character named H (is this the answer to Greenaway's riddle about the real identity of H?) who travels through place-scales represented not by fictional maps but by real landscapes. *Of Great Events and Ordinary People* shares the same formal concerns as all Greenaway's films, particularly *The Falls*, but its context is a real place, a district of Paris, and a real time, the 1978 French elections. One of Greenaway's current projects, *The Bathroom Arrest*, has close analogies with a favourite short story, Kafka's 'The Penal Colony', which Ruiz has himself filmed as a political metaphor for the Latin American situation. The Greenaway project, however, envisages a literary remake of *Vertical Features*. Thus, for Ruiz, what is real is that cerebral truth that cannot be represented transparently. While for Greenaway, what is real is precisely that physical truth which cannot be represented.

This is most clearly articulated in *Act of God*, Greenaway's documentary about people struck by lightning. Here the essential intrigue revolves round the practical problem of how to represent the incomprehensible nature of an act by the Supreme Unknowable Author Himself. Not only is a lightning strike an exact metaphor for the arbitrary relationship between subject and author, it also provides the ideal correlative for Greenaway's own fictional universe. The film's





THE DRAUGHTSMAN'S CONTRACT

location photographs by Simon Archer

- 1 Statuesque Michael Feast.
- 2 Mr Neville (Anthony Higgins) drafting.
- 3 The estate manager (Neil Cunningham).
- 4 A stroll past vertical features.
- 5 The draughtsman and the daughter (Anne Louise Lambert) of his patroness.
- 6 Table talk, on set.
- 7 The experience of landscape.



mixture of statistics and apocrypha at once shows up the absence of both the real Author and the real Act (of creation/death). The film is a real metaphor for a fictional universe, it is at once Romantic and Semantic.

The apogee of the author and his art/facts/artefacts from the real world is reached in *The Falls*. Its premise is a fictional version of *Act of God*: a Violent Unknown Event has struck the world leaving behind some nineteen million survivors; ninety-two case histories are catalogued. And Greenaway is similarly concerned with organising diverse forms, stills, documentary, live-action, interview, reportage, within a coherent text. 'I was just interested in all the different ways that you could put pictures together,' he said. 'In a sense it was a compendium of all the editing techniques I've learnt and also a few more I've found for myself. And also all the other forms of representation vis à vis the visual tradition of Europe.'

With *The Falls* Greenaway's structuralist quest for coherence is seen to collapse into nothing more than a rather despairing mirror image of his own romanticism. Both look back to his own past as a film editor with the COI and to the forebears of that organisation, the GPO and EMB film units of the 30s and 40s. The marks of Griersonian aestheticism, however, are always undercut by the film's amusement at its own status as a cultural object. Greenaway's statement about *The Falls* might be interpreted as implying that the film-maker had finally accepted that the splintering forms of the world were ultimately unclassifiable. And so the only truth left to represent was his confession that, as the spurious inventor of self-consistent artefacts, he himself was a fiction. Hence the film discourses with neither its subject matter nor its authorial style but its audience, ninety-two random people gathered to watch a white screen. Greenaway's most recently completed film, *Zandra Rhodes*, a COI documentary on the dress designer, secretly demolishes a character who sees herself as an author of world taste. 'Zandra Rhodes', the label as personality, represents—to quote another Ruiz title—*The Scattered Body and the World Upside Down*.

The Falls was joint-winner of the 1980 BFI Special Award, and *Act of God* was judged best short film at the 1981 Melbourne Film Festival. Public recognition, however, might raise more problems, create more ironies and lead to more subversions than can possibly be contained within the past scope of Greenaway's work. This said, Greenaway, at thirty-nine, has long thought it time to make 'a more public commitment'. Mamoun Hassan, managing director of the NFFC, wished to ask him whether he was a private or a public film-maker. 'The gap between *The Falls* and *The Draughtsman's Contract* is an attempt to answer that question.'

Greenaway's approach to the shooting of *The Draughtsman's Contract* was guided by *Last Year in Marienbad*,

which he wanted to show to his cast and crew as an indication of his own aims. The wide framing of the main characters and the use of a fixed static camera are his chief devices for maintaining the requisite distance from the emotional foreground of a stuffily theatrical plot. But as Resnais recognised, even with an artificial narrative, the story does matter; and here much more so than in the 'drama-docs' because players are 'real people working for a living'. And, it has to be admitted, Greenaway has never seemed particularly interested in the daily story of human frailty and vanity, except in so far as it concerns the relationship of an artist to either his patron or his subjects. 'Your significance, Mr Neville,' a second patroness tells the draughtsman, 'is attributable to both innocence and arrogance in equal parts.'

Nowadays Greenaway rarely goes to the cinema, his expressed purpose being 'to bring together the painting and the literature for which film is the ideal medium.' His latest project, *Jonson and Jones*, is concerned with the stormy relationship between the writer (Ben) and the architect (Inigo). Meanwhile, *The Draughtsman's Contract* will test Greenaway's range and the scale of audience which the BFI's most costly production can attract. If it does make money, then it could prove doubly important. For, in a significant development in the field of independent film-making, the Fourth Channel has made a £280,000 subvention to the BFI Production Board. The board allocated £40,000 of this plus £80,000 of its own money to *The Draughtsman's Contract*. But even with a further £40,000 from unspecified sources, the film finished a week and a half over a seven week schedule and way over budget. On the strength of a show reel, however, various distributors are reported to be keen to make up the deficit, a hopeful sign for future co-operation between the British film and television industries.

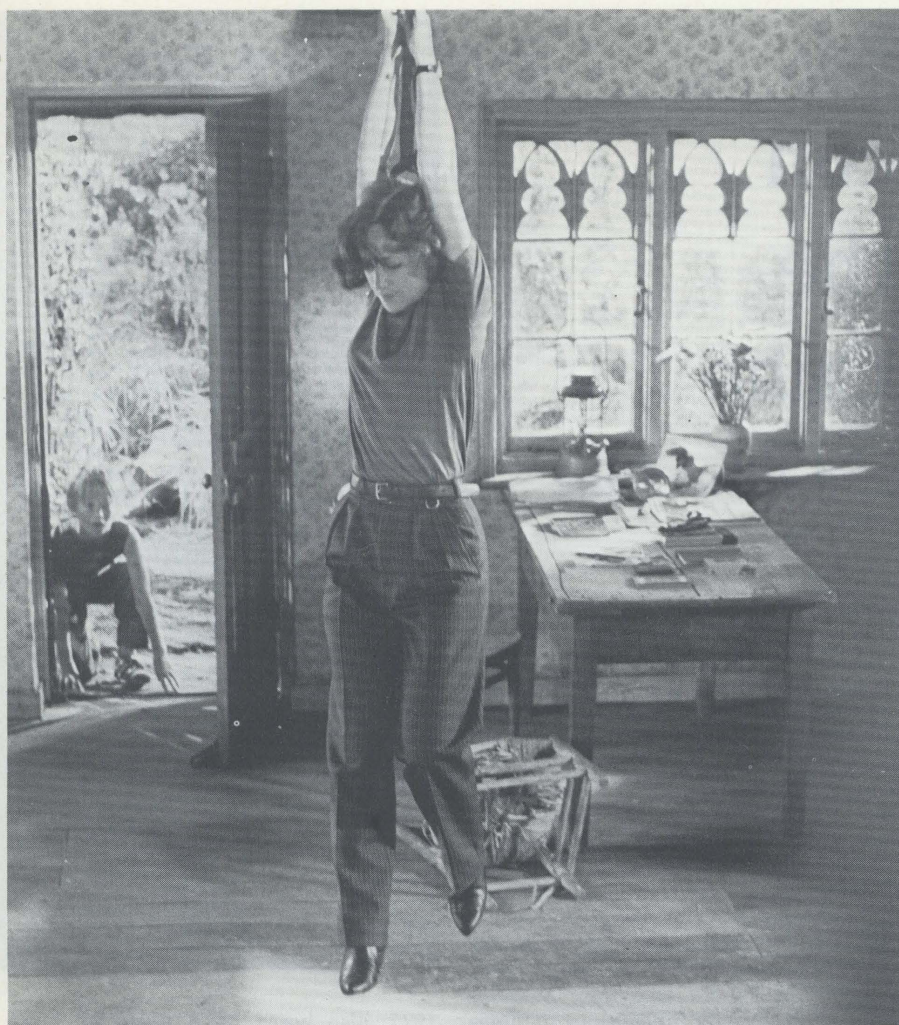
In many ways, Peter Greenaway does represent the ideal artist for such patronage, combining in his work the authorless modes of television and the myth-based structures of cinema. Moreover, he himself sees his art as rooted in an English tradition. Here the provenance of *The Draughtsman's Contract* is revealing. 'Summer of '76, beautiful summer, drawing the rather nondescript Victorian house near Hay-on-Wye belonging to a friend. I was interested in the ways that either the drawings reflected or did not reflect what was in front of me. The question of whether the draughtsman draws what he sees or what he knows. Thought what a nice idea, how could I use it in a larger scenario?' He later added, 'The thing I enjoy doing most of all, and I don't want to sound too romantic, is just the experience of landscape. At its very best, the reality of landscape is much more profound than any attempt to try to change it, transform it into an art form. It makes me a very English film-maker. It's been a concern for English literature, English painting for four, five, six hundred years.' □

An Unsuitable Job for a Woman John Pym

Looking for a subject for his second feature, his first film proper, Chris Petit read through a pile of British detective fiction. The works of Agatha Christie, at first seriously considered, were rejected having yielded no plot, location or set of characters which could be successfully subverted without being overtly parodied. He finally settled on *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* by P. D. James, 'the new Queen of Crime', as an American newsmagazine and her paperback publisher has it, which was filmable, in terms of his own industry experience, and because, more importantly, it was also sufficiently non-deterministic, in terms of its plot and setting, to allow for a certain amount of judicious adaptation. Cordelia Gray, aged 23, the novel's heroine, was not locked into the society in which she earned a decidedly precarious living to the same extent that Miss Marple was locked into the world of an older, more assured England.

Petit's first film, *Radio On*—'I've long since ceased trying to explain what it meant'—was a very calculated début. 'I had,' he said at the time, 'a certain amount of access to film people but very little credibility.' As a long-time film critic with London's old *Time Out* magazine, he had also, however, a fairly clear idea of the modern 'European'/British film he wished to write and direct. He developed the sort of script that he knew, as a first film, would find finance. The script was endorsed by Wim Wenders and put on the market baited with the promise of one-third of its budget from Wenders' Berlin production company. The BFI and the NFFC were hooked. The result was a singular and surprisingly competent art movie, in the manner, perhaps, of Wenders at his most abstract rather than his most 'naturalistic'. It communicated, in a way which stopped just short of being artistically commercial, a sense of characters simply 'being' on screen, with no history and no discernible purpose to their lives. Things happened, opportunities were missed less with regret than melancholy resignation.

An Unsuitable Job for a Woman (cost £750,000) represents another sort of calculation, a more mainstream one, although not one which Petit himself believes is quite clear to his financiers,



'An Unsuitable Job for a Woman'. Above: Pippa Guard; right: Billie Whitelaw.

this time Boyd's Co (the producers of such diverse films as *Scum* and *The Tempest*), through Goldcrest and the NFFC. While *Radio On*, a tailored festival film, was evidently influenced and backed by the New German Cinema, *An Unsuitable Job*—despite the relative youth of its production company—is backed by an older and more overtly British tradition. One of the co-producers is the veteran Michael Relph; and Petit himself was aware, with a slight nostalgic tug, of the traditions of Bray Studios, where, incidentally, his was the only film in production last September. Did he still feel himself a novice? He replied by saying that his cameraman, Martin Schäfer, who had made such a distinctive black and white contribution to *Radio On*, was slightly, if silently, disconcerted by his first experience of the British industry's unionised demarcation of duties. As for himself, he would admit that the film had taught him caution: that he did not, in fact, have to start shooting in the first minute of the working day because there were a score of technicians waiting for his orders.

AS SIGHT AND SOUND goes to press, *An Unsuitable Job*—the account of Cordelia Gray's first, seamily instructive job after she inherits Pryde's Detective Agency from Bernie, her late partner and mentor—is in the latter stages of editing. Petit is adamant that he has not made a festival film, but he is slightly perplexed

about exactly what category it fits; it is, it seems, not quite a thriller, not quite an art movie. There are references to Godard and Sam Fuller (though you will have to find them yourself), and the film starts with an interpolated prologue in which Cordelia—detective turned babysitter—reads Kafka's 'A Little Fable' from *The Great Wall of China*. A mouse, trapped in the last chamber of a shrinking world, confronts a cat. 'And what did the cat say?' Cordelia asks her charge. 'It said, "You only need to change direction." And then it ate it up.' 'Again! Again!' cries the little girl.

'I've aimed for a sort of studio-bound reality,' Petit said. 'And I'm pleased that Martin Schäfer, my close collaborator, has succeeded in making real places, the cottage, for example, in which Cordelia stays while investigating the young man's death, curiously unreal. I was aiming, if you want a comparison, for something of the look of *Moonfleet*.' A certain noirish quality has been achieved by breaking with the Eastman Colour tradition of mainstream British film-making. *An Unsuitable Job* has been shot on a new Agfa stock, slightly less expensive than Eastman, though not chosen for that reason. The overall effect is somewhat harder, with more pronounced reds and greens, in keeping, Petit holds, with the muscular independence of the heroine, played by Pippa Guard, a former member of the RSC, here in her first major

film role. In Germany, Schäfer has been accustomed to mixing Agfa and Eastman, the latter for night scenes; in *An Unsuitable Job*, Agfa was used for both day and night with, according to Petit, surprisingly good results.

It seems odd that this will be the first P. D. James adaptation, although Mike Nichols is scheduled to direct a Hollywood version from Tom Stoppard's script of her later novel *Innocent Blood*. Cordelia Gray, who makes her first and only appearance in *An Unsuitable Job*, is an immensely attractive contemporary heroine. Petit and his co-writers Elizabeth McKay and Brian Scobie have shaded in the sexual side of her nature (she leaves a proposition on a friend's telephone answering machine), but in essence she remains a notably unstrident feminist, though a feminist she undoubtedly is. She is above all, perhaps, a capable and modest person. The novel's title is certainly ironic, but at the same time Cordelia is woefully 'unsuitable', until that is she has been educated in the ways of detection. She has, in the novel at least, a sort of winning naivety: her insistence on correct police procedure, drummed in by Bernie, is strangely old-fashioned, her zeal and fortitude not exactly of our time. What Chris Petit, the celebrant of anomie, of the beaten-down man without a last name who plays records to the night workers in a London biscuit factory, will make of this resilient creature remains, intriguingly, to be seen.

Petit does, however, speak warmly of his collaborators. The Guard family have been corralled for the film. Pippa's cousin Dominic plays Lunn, the heavy, and her brother Alex makes an appearance as the remains of the suicide. Breaking with the non-actorish traditions of *Radio On*, Petit has cast those two eminently actorly players Billie Whitelaw and Elizabeth Spriggs as the steely Miss Leaming and the scatty Miss Markland respectively. Petit is particularly pleased with the presence of Paul Freeman, seen recently as the caricatured Belloq in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Freeman plays Ronald Callender, transformed from the novel's medical research tycoon into a businessman with tentacular contacts; he has, Petit says, 'that prized screen quality of just "being".'

The Rubicon and the Rubik Cube

Exile, Paradox and Raul Ruiz

Gilbert Adair

To paraphrase the establishing stage direction of Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, Raul Ruiz was born in Chile, i.e. nowhere. Indeed, his earliest memory—so at least he assured me when we were writing the script of *The Territory* together in a hotel room in Sintra—is of being actually 'discovered', while mooning around on the doorstep of his parents' home, by a party of English explorers, whom he conjured up for me as scanning the horizon in Jungle Jim safari outfits, earnest hands cupped over noble brows. (When, on the telling of another, no less outrageous, anecdote, I asked him point blank if he was lying, he vigorously protested his innocence—as, of course, would both a liar and an honest man.) Since the military coup of 1973, Ruiz has lived in exile, i.e. everywhere—for, from that point on, his filmography has imposed a different geographical abbreviation after virtually each entry (to date, Ital., Fran., Ger., Hond., Port., and Holl.). It was almost by chance that he decided to settle in Paris, the capital of exile, where he now lives with his wife, Valeria Sarmiento, a *cinéaste* herself who edits his films as unaffectedly as another woman might sew the buttons on her husband's shirts.

But even there, by refusing to emulate the example of his fellow countrymen, Helvio Soto and Miguel Littin, the glib euphoria of whose pro-Allende work has been followed, in Europe, by lachrymose autopsies of the débâcle, Ruiz has paradoxically contrived to exile himself again—from its tight little community of Latin American expatriates. In 1978, for instance, he acquired a whole new reputation with an apolitical 'art film' in a hallowed if by now somewhat discredited Parisian tradition, *L'Hypothèse du tableau volé* (*The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting*). It was based on a contemporary classic, *Le Baphomet*, by the novelist and Nietzschean philosopher Pierre Klossowski, was exquisitely shot by Sacha Vierny, and in no way sought to curb the discreet hamming of French avant-garde actors. Notwithstanding such apparently solid cultural founda-

tions, he still managed to avoid ingratiating himself with his backers, the redoubtable INA. *L'Hypothèse* turned out to be less a straight adaptation than a witty series of variations on Klossowskian (and Ruizian) themes; the pearly black and white photography, a pastiche of Alekan's for *La Belle et la bête*, was revealed as too monochromatically grey for comfortable TV viewing; as for the cast, their potential for histrionics was effectively neutralised by their being obliged, throughout the film, to adopt and sustain kitschy *tableau vivant* poses (during which—the supreme irony—they were also supposed to *fidget*, surely the hardest thing to ask of any trained actor).

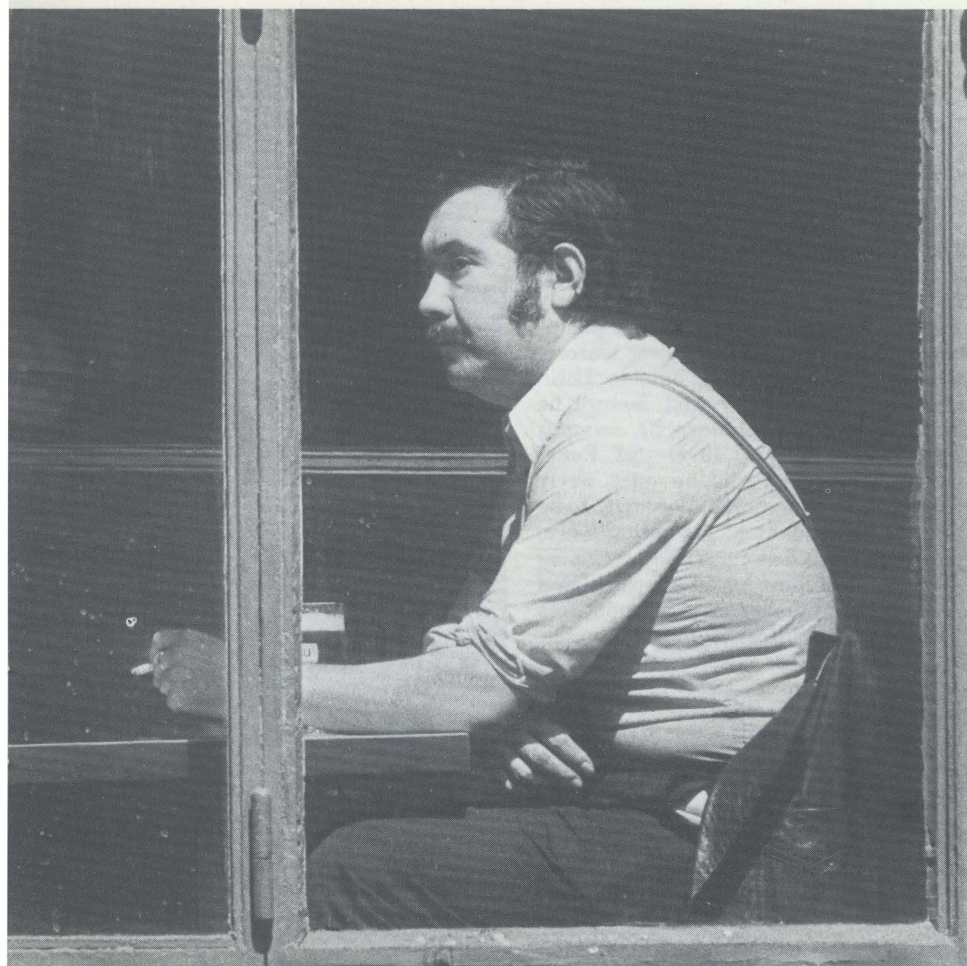
Since that breakthrough, Ruiz has worked extensively for television, never failing to secure commissions, though undertaking them in the spirit of a soldier performing some despised chore with just enough slyly exaggerated goodwill to make his troubled superiors suspect for a moment that he is being insolent, before shamefacedly dismissing the notion. He has become a Sunday director—quite literally, in the sense of a 'Sunday painter'—pottering every free weekend at an extraordinary serial, *Le Borgne* (*The One-Eyed Man*), with the assistance of friends and technicians from his television work. And, latterly, he persuaded Roger Corman to invest in what he has pleasantly described as 'a philosophical exploitation movie', *The Territory*, filmed in Portugal a year ago under hair-raising circumstances. Loosely translating from the title of one of his shorts, *Le Jeu de l'oie* (1980), Ian Christie captioned his brief introduction to a recent National Film Theatre retrospective of Ruiz's work 'Snakes and Ladders'; and though it's a term that could apply equally well to the roller-coaster careers of any number of adventurous film-makers, what sets him apart is that he would seem to have learned how to climb the snakes.

If *L'Hypothèse* and the feature that immediately preceded it, *La Vocation suspendue* (*The Suspended Vocation*,



1977, also based on a novel by Klossowski), did, as I say, represent something of a watershed in critical appreciation of Ruiz's work (which could no longer be filed indiscriminately under 'Third World'), the degree to which they constituted a definitive break with his Chilean preoccupations is less certain. In fact, at the very outset of his career, one might have been forgiven for writing him off as a *cinéophile* of the purest water. When in 1967 he was shooting his official opus I, *El Tango del viudo* (*Widower's Tango*), a self-styled 'expressionist' film à la Polanski which was left uncompleted and has since been mislaid, his initial reaction to the riots which were then a daily feature of Chilean life was an aesthete's tetchy exasperation at how police brutality kept getting in the way of the picturesquely ominous 'chiricoscuro', as it were, of Santiago's lonely streets and piazzas.

In two other films from that period, *Tres tristes tigres* (*Three Sad Tigers*, 1968—it shares its curious title, a tongue-twister in Spanish, with a celebrated novel by Guillermo Cabrera Infante), and *Nadie dijo nada* (*Nobody Said Anything*, 1971, from Max Beerbohm's short—and tall—story 'Enoch Soames'), current political issues were only peripherally touched upon. Yet, by virtue of the devious narrative strategies already practised by Ruiz, as well as his radical dismantling of cultural stereotypes through performance and dialogue, the relation they bore to the films that Chileans were accustomed to seeing—mostly steamy Mexican melodramas and the



ubiquitous Hollywood fare—undoubtedly deserved to be called political.

Both are set among Santiago's *lumpen-intelligentsia*, in a world of tiny, cramped apartments, furnished with little more than a bed, a shelf of books and a record-player, and unalluringly *louche* taverns whose décor and lighting are reminiscent of nothing so much as those ludicrous cinema ads for some restaurant, usually 'exotic', adjacent to the Odeon or whatever. In each case, the gist of the plot—respectively, a woman's self-prostitution as a favour to her nebbish of a brother and, of course, Soames' pact with the devil (here a crooner so unctuously suave in manner that he is forever being taken for an Argentinian)—is embedded in a packed tissue of verbal and situational digressions as characters are encouraged to ramble on at length on topics whose relevance is not immediately evident, while matters of greater *a priori* concern are dropped as soon as raised. E.g., an exchange from *Nobody Said Anything*:

'You remember the letter she sent me?'

'You mean, the suicide one?'

'No, no, the other one. . .?'

As it happens, the other letter is the essential one, but that lone reference to a suicide note, so nonchalantly tossed into the conversation, does tend to nag at one.

Though summoned to the foreground from time to time, the plotline appears to enjoy no particularly privileged status within the overall narrative fabric. And compounding the difficulties for a non-

Spanish speaking spectator is the frequency with which the dialogue detaches itself from a character to take on wilful life of its own, so that anyone dependent on an earphone commentary, as at the NFT, may begin to find himself wondering whether the commentator has got his scripts muddled. Personal pronouns develop schizophrenia, verbs float freely, disengaged from any specified 'doer', and syntactical units that one would have thought crucial to comprehension are simply omitted. (By way of explaining how these devices function, Raul once told me an amusing riddle. A man enters a bar and asks for a glass of water. Instead of serving him, the barman pulls out a revolver and aims it at him. Whereupon the startled *but grateful* customer takes his leave. What has to be figured out is the single missing detail which would invest this weird sequence of events with a semblance of logic.)

Such play with the ambiguities of his native language is not only confined to his films. I recollect an evening in Sintra when we were celebrating the birthday of a crew member, who had just regaled us with a *fado*, one of those ineffably mournful Portuguese folk-songs. Afterwards, in lieu of a toast, a beaming Raul recited a Gongoresque sonnet (Gongora was the Spanish Mallarmé) which he had dashed off God knows when—and which, to my astonishment, was received none too enthusiastically by the object of its homage. I later learned from Raul, who remained quite unfazed, that what had cast a chill over the proceedings was the poem's equivocal punning on the word



Left above: Raul Ruiz. Top: 'The Territory' (1981); centre: 'La Vocation suspendue' (1977); bottom: 'Tres Tristes Tigres' (1968).

fardo, Spanish for 'burdensome', and that Chileans prefer their compliments to be so elaborately double-edged.

While *Nobody Said Anything* is visually undistinguished—like *La Expropiación* (*The Expropriation*, 1972), an ironic dissection of the scheme whereby the Allende government transferred ownership of hitherto private estates to the peasants who had been employed on them—the narrative fragmentation of *Three Sad Tigers* is articulated through hand-held camerawork of real virtuosity. That one's perception of this tends to be retrospective (I certainly was unaware as the film unfolded of any eye-catching display of pyrotechnics) can be attributed in part to the ingrained belief among movie buffs that a highly wrought visual style demands correspondingly sumptuous décors, not at all the case here. More significant reasons, however, might be the film's raw, even discordant, editing, which doesn't cut so much as undercut the action, frustrating the spectator of that almost subliminal coda of repose that would enable him to regain his bearings from one sequence to another; its framing, always a mite 'off', so that during most of the running time one aches from a craving to set the screen 'straight', as though it were a painting hung ever so slightly askew; and, above all, its refusal to allow the twin trajectories of camera movement and movement within the frame to run concurrently, subjecting them rather to an overlapping rhythm as disorienting in its way as the machine-gun dialogue of a screwball comedy.

Ruiz's collaborators (plus those Chilean critics sympathetic to his work) probably saw the film as a synthesis of neo-realist content and a loose-textured, New Wave-inspired *mise en scène* (as was true of Brazilian *cinema novo*); his chronic scepticism allied to a no less chronic distaste for all codified systems, however progressive, wholly transformed it. Exile clearly wasn't something that just 'happened' to him overnight. It was a state of being, a generalised form of alienation in the Brechtian sense. Already in Chile, the distance separating him from confrères who were pursuing ostensibly parallel aims was that between two athletes running side by side, one of whom has lapped the other. Nor was it exclusively, or even primarily, an aesthetic posture. *La Colonia Penal* (*The Penal Colony*, 1971, based on Kafka's novella), an anti-militaristic, anti-totalitarian fable set on an island off the coast of Peru which, in the director's words, 'produces news instead of copper', was made two years before the coup—and, it's worth remembering, in a country whose history by South American standards had been notably immune from military dictatorships. Less hypothetically, *The Expropriation* and *El Realismo socialista* (*Socialist Realism Considered as one of the Fine Arts*, 1973) called into question, not the transference of property or the occupation of factories instituted by Popular Unity, but the kind of uncritical, dogmatically positivist attitudes towards these measures that became current as the revol-

utionary process gathered momentum—an 'irresponsible' standpoint of no mean courage, given that Ruiz was one of Allende's cultural advisers. It's possible to surmise that, had there been no *coup d'état*, had Popular Unity survived and thrived, he would still have been forced to leave Chile sooner or later.

Life has never been a sinecure for Raul, but the hardships he encountered upon his arrival in Europe were particularly severe. After all, he was virtually penniless, spoke only Spanish and was scarcely a name to conjure with outside Latin America. Yet the very first feature he completed abroad, *Dialogo de exilados* (*Dialogue of Exiles*, 1974)—'of Panamanian nationality', as he once wryly defined its confused origin—proved to be a direct descendant of his earlier work; and its sardonic self-questioning affronted, as it must have been calculated to do, a good number of his compatriots then seeking political asylum in France. It chronicled the misadventures of a group of Chilean émigrés who kidnap a popular singer to prevent him from appearing at the Olympia (a Parisian variety hall) and thereby publicly sanctioning the junta.

Yielding neither to morale-boosting fantasies nor the wistful masochism of exiles for whom 'the Revolution' belongs essentially to an Arcadian past, Arcadian because it is the past (as in Losey and Jorge Semprun's *Les Routes du sud*), the film instead provides a bitter, often very funny gloss on the humdrum mechanics of the expatriate condition: at one point, for instance, the aspiring activists consult an old pro at political exile, a smooth operator of an Argentinian (played by the director Edgardo Cozarinsky) who passes on a few useful hints on improving their public relations. But exiles are, as the group's lethargically inept handling of the kidnapping would seem to indicate, failed revolutionaries almost by definition.

In the most controversial, most warmly contested sequence, funds donated to their cause by a liberal sympathiser melt away as each recipient of the envelope containing them is suddenly reminded of personal 'expenses' that require urgent settlement. Ruiz never goes so far as to imply that money is being embezzled (though he couldn't have been unprepared for the possibility of its being so interpreted); he limits himself to exposing a delicate problem likely to confront all clandestine political organisations. And again, considering the ease with which the hostage weaves in and out among his captors, his freedom of expression in no way circumscribed, it's tempting to regard his *petit-fasciste* (as one says *petit-bourgeois*) discourse—basically, 'yes, we disagree about how our country should be governed; yes, maybe the military have made mistakes; but, as Chileans together, we must learn to reconcile our differences for the good of all'—as voicing just another shade of opinion to be found in any heterogeneous collection of exiles. Of this character, Ruiz has commented: 'We always had the impression that among us exiles there



'Petit Manuel d'histoire de France' (1979),

was a fascist. Not one individual, but something in each of us; at one time I would be the fascist, another time it would be someone else. Fascism is alive, even among the exiles—this "Chilean-ism" which considers Chile as a country set apart in Latin America.'

Though the outline of the film's narrative was established in advance, its dialogue was mostly improvised, the non-professionals in the cast being 'carried' by the professionals (Daniel Gélin and Françoise Arnoul) much as the host of a talk show will endeavour to intercept any nervous fluffing on the part of his guests.

I can't report with much assurance on *Mensch verstreut und Welt verkehrt* (*The Scattered Body and the World Upside Down*, a Franco-German co-production of 1975), as the only print available for screening at the NFT retrospective was a bastardised version abridged for German television from ninety to sixty minutes. So insensitively was it re-edited that, had the programme booklet not synopsisised its arresting Powell-and-Pressburgerish plot conceit—two travelling salesmen are searching Honduras for pieces of a friend's body and, wherever they find one, they encounter some aspect of utopian socialism in action—one would have been hard put to detect any trace of it. A pity, for nothing in his oeuvre could be more certifiably 'Ruizian'. Each half of the title refers to a rhetorical figure peculiar to Chile's numerous 'illiterate' bards. The *World Upside Down* dictates a series of contradictory images—the thief becomes the judge, the whore becomes the nun;



a potted replay of French history. Photo: Jacques Chevy.

whereas in the *Scattered Body* the poet envisions the dismemberment of his own body, its various components strewn around the globe. If one is to believe Raul, however, the latter trope is far from being merely metaphorical: as a child, he claims, his favourite pastime was clambering over the local railway tracks in the hope of 'spotting', not trains, but the mutilated limbs of suicide victims—who were apparently legion. (And, to be sure, there is a scene in *The Territory*—a film about, though not categorically against, cannibalism—in which one of the characters unearths a cache of bones which he proceeds, with the neurotic tentativeness of a jigsaw puzzle addict, to reassemble into the skeleton of a human hand.)

In the same cheerfully morbid vein are Raul's reminiscences of his own adventures in Honduras. It was at Christmas 1975 that he flew there, with several cans of film in the baggage compartment and his total budget—five thousand dollars—stashed inside his wallet. The plane was so crowded with immigrant workers on holiday that hand-straps had to be hitched up in the aisle for the benefit of those who were obliged to stand. Then, to Raul's dismay, the pilot blithely announced that, with passengers crammed into every nook and cranny, all luggage had been left behind in Europe and would arrive on a subsequent flight—a whole week later. Then again, the driver of the ramshackle coach bringing them from the airport fell asleep at his steering wheel, causing the vehicle to swerve crazily along the coastal highway

before careening off it altogether and crashing into a tug which lay at anchor just offshore, an indignity borne by the majority of casualties with admirable fortitude. Finally, he told me, enquiring of one local why a set of two-way traffic lights was being installed on such an isolated thoroughfare, he was informed that accidents most frequently occurred between coaches and aircraft preparing to land! Henceforth, should the light be green for road traffic, any approaching plane would simply have to circle until such time as it changed to red. Hmm.

Before knuckling down to *La Vocation suspendue*, which strikes me as one of the indisputably great films of the 70s, a digression might be in order. There's a thesis to be written on the extent to which the stylistic modernity of certain film-makers appears to stem from the interpolation—sometimes playful, often not—of a number of filmic practices and by-products into the narrative substance of their work. Bresson's direction of non-professional actors, for instance, is founded on a sadistic exploitation of the dramatic possibilities of *le trac* (or stage fright); Ozu's later, and more static, films are alone in acknowledging (as has been pointed out by Jonathan Rosenbaum) that cinema viewing is a sedentary, contemplative occupation; Hitchcock and his epigones capitalise on the fact that, while we are absorbing their shock effects, we are in the dark among strangers; the topographical complexity of Tati's *Playtime*, on the other hand, is a direct reflection of the multiplicity of 'angles'

open to a spectator about to choose his seat in the auditorium; and, by a beguiling reversal, Wenders' obsessive tracking shots owe much of their unique fascination to the way they evoke meta-cinematic epiphanies familiar to us all, such as watching a landscape disappear in the wake of a speeding car while 'cheap' music blares from its radio.

What Ruiz interpolates into his fictions is, to simplify grossly, a giggle (or, in more apposite French, *un fou rire*). Not that this is quite how they are greeted by most audiences. Actually, they solicit a reaction—halfway between giggling and utter solemnity—that tends to baffle the facial muscles. Still, I was intrigued, when invited recently to take a peek at the rushes of his latest film, *Le Toit de la baleine* (*The Roof of the Whale*), set in Patagonia and shot just outside Rotterdam, by the regularity with which the performers would crease up after his call of 'Cut'. Such unprofessional demeanour may, of course, have been provoked by the eccentric nature of the project—a film 'about language' spoken in five different tongues with no subtitles envisaged. Or by the nature of one particular sequence I saw—a fractured dialogue in German and English (which was also, in a sense, a dialogue between German and English) on the respective merits of Mozart and Beethoven, from the revolutionary thrust of their compositions down to which of the two had been allotted 'nicer record sleeves'. But even with the polished if somehow wobbly performances in *La Vocation* one has the distinct impression that nervous giggles are never far away and that the cutting-room floor must have been awash with them. All of which may sound spectacularly trivial. Except that there is finally nothing funnier than laughter itself, certainly nothing more contagiously so; and, intentional or not, I suspect that the very peculiar tone of Ruiz's later work can be ascribed to this submerged ripple of self-deflation.

A synopsis of the novel on which *La Vocation suspendue* was based would have to coincide word for word with the original, like Borges' globe of the world whose dimensions rivalled those of the world itself. That the film version preserves intact Klossowski's Byzantine occultation may explain why it has received such meagre coverage, even from those who profess to be admirers of Ruiz (how gratifying, then, to mention that one of the few articles ever to appear—an essay by Richard Roud usefully coupling it with Truffaut's *La Chambre verte*—was published in this magazine). But it can briefly be summarised as recounting the dilemma of a young seminarist caught up in the ideological feuding of the Jesuits and the partisans of a matriarchal Church based on the cult of the Virgin, the latter further subdividing into two equally opposed sects. Such doubling and redoubling functions as a *mise en abyme* of the film's own esoteric construction (as of a *Radio Times* cover depicting the same *Radio Times* cover depicting the same cover...).

In fact, there purports to be two films, boasting separate casts, one supposedly

shot in the 40s, the other its revisionist remake from the 60s. These, respectively in black and white (or on occasion sepia) and colour, are by no means impeccably intercut. An actor from one will stray into the other; ambiguous cross-cutting between the two misleads us into believing the same cinematic space to be intimately cohabited; and the odd contemporary incidental—a Volkswagen van, a pinned-up reminder that Maurice Cloche's *Monsieur Vincent* (whose oleaginous textures are parodied by Vierny's photography) is playing on television—surfaces anachronistically in the earlier version. Further *outré* complications include a monastery fresco in which St Bernard, who rejected the doctrine of Immaculate Conception, is mysteriously painted into a Nativity; an atrocity snapshot of a ravished nun which turns out to have been fraudulently perpetrated by an atheistic painter (played by Daniel Gélin) and his mistress; and the fact that, by the film's end and according to the precepts of the World Upside Down, the mistress has indeed become a nun while the painter coolly serves Mass to the faithful.

Ruiz (a former seminarist himself, as was Klossowski) portrays the Catholic Church as a secret society, a freemasonry, the paradigm of all totalitarian institutions, not excluding its supposedly diametric antithesis, the Communist Party: Roud makes a neat comparison between St Bernard's suspect proximity to the Virgin and the inconvenient presence of Trotsky, say, in early photographs of the Bolsheviks. One of the gnomic apophthegms punctuating a recent issue of *Ca Cinéma* which Ruiz jointly edited with Jean-Louis Shefer was 'Un château est l'image de la peur'; and here the Church is only the first of those monolithic citadels—latent labyrinths no less than the barren Hungarian plains of Jancsó's films—which will reappear in *Les Divisions de la nature* (*The Divisions of Nature*, 1978, a whimsical 'anti-documentary' on the Château de Chambord), *Petit Manuel d'histoire de France* (*Short Primer of French History*, 1979, a potted replay of the country's history, as dramatised by French TV, from 'nos ancêtres' the Gauls to the invention of cinema), *The Territory* and even *Image de sable* (*Image of Sand*, 1981, a 15-minute short about a Ludwig II of sandcastles)—all commissioned works.

Because, for the first time, he respected both Klossowski's dialogue and the *découpage* of his own shooting script, there is an abundance of visual felicities of a kind unthinkable in the free-for-all of his Chilean period. Ruizian *trouvailles* abound: a gold-embossed family album in which lewd pin-ups jostle with childhood snaps, a hilarious Swingle Singers-type chorale to accompany some of the film's more austere imagery, a two-headed crucifix like a playing-card. If so profoundly *sui generis* an artefact as *La Vocation suspendue* can be compared to anything on this earth, it might be to a cross—appropriately enough—between *The Castle* and Firbank's *Concerning the Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli* (or

perhaps to a Gideon Bible I once found in an American motel and whose bookmark was a filthy postcard).

Ruiz has defined his cinema as deliberately caught 'between two stools', or as deliberately cancelling itself out. A loose, 'unframed' shot will be counterbalanced by an equally 'unframed' reverse-angle shot so as to achieve an effect of perfect symmetry. His regular composer, Jorge Arriagada, will write an immaculately dodecaphonic score (as he did for *The Territory*), which manages nevertheless to emerge on the soundtrack as closer in spirit to Elgar than Schoenberg. Just as Picasso has 'influenced' the painters he pastiched (Goya, Delacroix)—or at least influenced the way one looks at their work—so a film like *L'Hypothèse du tableau volé*, in which nothing is as it seems, may alter one's perception of its models (*La Belle et la bête*, French *cinéma de qualité* in general), as well as cast doubts on the 'sincerity' of the use of a hand-held camera in what one fondly imagined were more or less straightforward political statements.

In *L'Hypothèse*, we are guided by a 'collector' (the late Jean Rougeul, memorable as the garrulous intellectual in *8½*) around the pieces of his collection, all of them by an academic painter of the Second Empire, Frédéric Tonnerre. These paintings, however—Diana pursued by Actaeon, a game of chess between two Knights Templar, a naked, martyred youth with the glittering torso of an arrowless Sebastian—are not *tableaux* at all but *tableaux vivants*, disposed about his villa and garden like slightly gamy Art Nouveau statuary. What the film and its protagonist (albeit independently of each other) are seeking to elucidate is both the identity of the 'missing painting' and the reason behind its once scandalised rejection by polite society; and since not a few of the poetic traps sprung by Ruiz can claim kinship with the closed-room strategies of Gaston Leroux and John Dickson Carr, it would be unporting of me to reveal the solution here (even if I—or, I suspect, anyone else—had fathomed it sufficiently to be able to do so). A *jeu d'esprit*, perhaps, but one which also proposes a serious meditation on four types of representational space: pictorial, sculptural, cinematic and, less easily definable, that curious amalgam of all three whose innocent expression might be the diminutive vistas one peers at through a View-Master device. And so rarefied has the kitsch become as to be well nigh indistinguishable from the Olympian 'high art' it cunningly parodies.

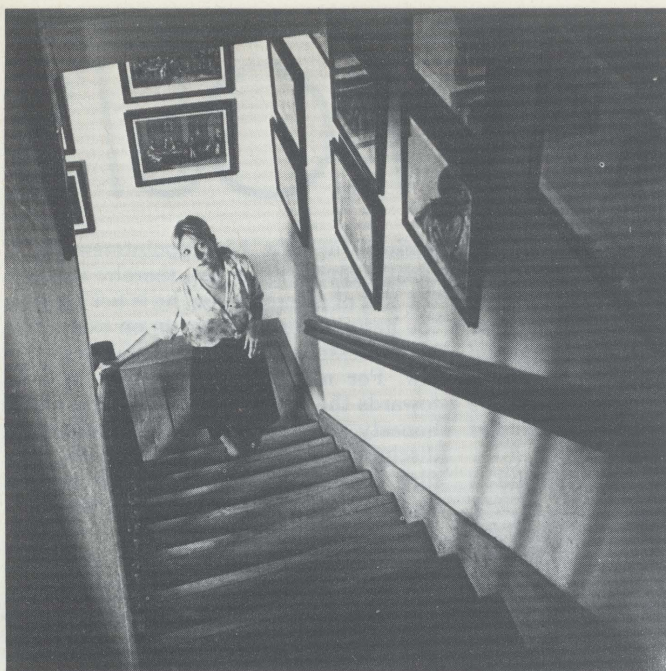
It would be impossible within the limits of a single article to do justice to the bewildering variety of Ruiz's television films: to those already mentioned one might add the well-known *Colloque de chiens* (*Dogs' Dialogue*, 1977), in which Vico's cyclical theory is superimposed on the grid of a lurid *roman-photo*, and *Débats* (*Debates*, 1979), or the TV panel discussion considered as one of the fine arts, in which various apparently simulated interviews—such as that with an Erik Satie fanatic who would like to see

newspapers run a daily Satie feature next to the weather report and horoscope—prove to be quite genuine.

Ever the metaphysician, the admirer of Wittgenstein, Berkeley and Chesterton, Ruiz has begun to explore a field of philosophical speculation which must be without precedent in film history. It finds its purest, most abstract form in *Le Borgne*, the ambition of whose twenty episodes will be not only to encompass the entire spectrum of cinematic procedures but to co-opt them into serving as the very subject-matter of the film's narrative. From this angle, then, there is nothing illogical about his enthusiasm for flamboyant, even vulgar, special effects—which, it should be noted, are light years away from computerised science-fiction and have more to do with Georg Lukacs than George Lucas. Instead of contenting himself with mere imitation, Ruiz lured the veteran cinematographer Henri Alekan out of an enforced semi-retirement to be his lighting cameraman on *Les Divisions de la nature* and *The Territory*. As with the forest's shifting penumbra in the latter work, so Alekan dissolves the rock-solid façade of Chambord into an eye-dazzling kaleidoscope of filters until it recedes further and further from both view and comprehension. And if such use of photographic effects to undermine a spectator's perception seems simplistic, one has only to remember how important were 'optical illusions' to philosophers of the printed page.

When this article is published, Ruiz will have—*deo volente*—completed another feature in Portugal, *Las Cuatro coronas del marinero* (*The Four Crowns of the Sailor*), based on his own short story and, vaguely, on 'The Ancient Mariner'. For INA again, with Isabelle Weingarten, he plans to adapt a celebrated news item about a Frenchwoman who never once took her garbage out in almost thirty years. And there are hopes one day to film Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday* and James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. (Channel 4?) In an interview with *Cahiers du Cinéma*, he described three characteristic Chilean attitudes. That of Lautaro, an Indian who was befriended by the Spaniards and who meticulously studied their methods for no other reason than to turn them against his masters. That of Jimmy Button, an illiterate Indian adopted by the captain of the 'Beagle' on Darwin's first voyage: although he learned English in three weeks, went to Oxford and was even called to the Bar, he forgot everything on his return to South America. And that of Valderomat, the Chilean Oscar Wilde, who was the darling of the salons before drowning himself in a sewer. Asked which of them he identified with, Raul replied, 'I have the feeling I float from one to the other...' Three-in-one, the Trinity: knowing him, I can imagine his amusement at thus embodying the most unintelligible of all theological paradoxes.

And by the way—if you're still wondering about the man who was treated so strangely when he requested a glass of water, the answer is that he had the hiccups. ■



Bulle Ogier in 'Aspern'.

Aspern

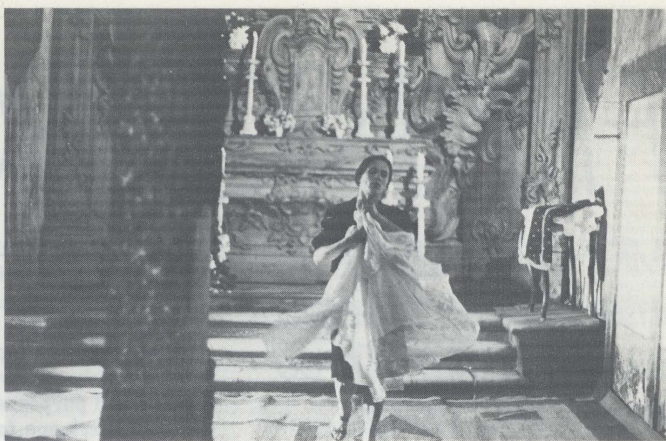
David Badder

Following the sudden upsurge of foreign film-makers working in Portugal and the belated international recognition of Manoel de Oliveira, Portuguese film production seems poised at last to make a significant impression. That Portugal should become a regular home for foreign productions and film-makers makes sound economic sense, since costs generally are low compared to most other Western countries. But, although there are several exceptions, the current crop of movies is very largely due to the efforts of the young Portuguese producer Paolo Branco.

Oxalá, directed by the critic Antonio Vasconcelos, was the first film from Branco's company, V. O. Films; it was two years in the making and opened early in 1981 to an enthusiastic reception. Since then, in some twelve months, Branco has completed three further films by Portuguese directors, *Silvestre*, *Conversa Acabada* and Oliveira's *Francisca*. He has also produced the work of three outsiders: Raul Ruiz's *The Territory*, written by Gilbert Adair; Wim Wenders' *The State of Things*; and an updated version of *The Aspern Papers*, directed by Eduardo de Gregorio and scripted by Michael Graham.

Sheer hard work has paid off. Branco's office is frantic with activity, and not a little disorganisation. The tightest shooting schedules are achieved on time by working days of up to sixteen hours. Indeed, Branco is so much on the move that one needs to anticipate his whereabouts a day ahead in order to stand a chance of intercepting him. Fortunately, like many of his fellow-countrymen, he apparently disdains sleep and so his intention to maintain this pace—another film with de Gregorio, for instance—has a fighting chance of success.

The Aspern Papers (shooting title *Aspern*), a comparatively free adaptation of the Henry James novella, has been relocated from 19th century Venice to the environs of present-day Lisbon. The script preserves the essence of James' moral conundrum—should the secrets of the illustrious dead be ferreted out, when the feelings of the living are likely to be hurt?—and is constructed around the disruption and interplay of character occasioned by the abrupt intrusion of a stranger into an established household.



Top: Teresa Madruga; above: Alida Valli.
Photographs: Gabriel Andrade Lopes.

The eager truth-seeker (Jean Sorel), avid for any details of the old affair of the heart between Miss Juliana Bordereau (Alida Valli) and the long dead author Jeffrey Aspern, discovers a lady and her niece who are much younger, less reclusive and therefore far more accessible than James' stoical hermits. In addition, although the details are at present Graham and de Gregorio's secret, the story has been opened out somewhat from the enclosed world of the original. One gathers, however, that Miss Tita (Bulle Ogier) leads an active community life and that much more is seen of the investigator's pursuits outside the Bordereau residence.

James' middle-period style should be ideal for de Gregorio. One recalls his earlier fascination, both as scriptwriter and director, with the themes of time and memory (*La Mémoire courte*, *The Spider's Stratagem*), role-playing (*Sérail*), and guilt (the former films again). Perhaps as importantly, the finely drawn undertow of suspense which permeates the novella, unstated yet building to a surprise ending, looks tailored for a director who has demonstrated in his two previous films a flair for nuances of character and situation. In *SIGHT AND SOUND* (Spring 1980), de Gregorio described his technique thus: 'I didn't want the audience to see *everything* . . . still conveying the feeling of a *lack*, that each thing is something more than is there.' *Aspern*, which has been shot in French, should be due for release early in 1982.

FRANCESCO ROSI'S

MICHEL CIMENT
interviews Rosi about
his latest film 'Three
Brothers', which
opened in London in
the autumn

FRANCESCO ROSI: I had been wanting to tell the story of an Italian family for a long time. I even remember talking about it to Tullio Kezich while we were filming *Salvatore Giuliano* twenty years ago. I was caught up in other projects and kept putting this one off, though I never gave up the idea. And the facts of Italian life haven't changed: the coexistence of different cultures, the continuing problems of emigration, the quest for work, desertion from the villages, the fate of people from the South cut off from their cultural origins and the traumatic effect this has on the way they think and live. One day, as though ripened by recent events in my own life, I felt a sort of urge to present them on the screen. In Italy, moreover, politics are becoming increasingly entangled with private concerns. I felt that to tell the story of a family from the South in Italy today was an opportunity to deal with every aspect of our lives, and that I could symbolise the country's three major problems through the choice of professions for the three brothers.

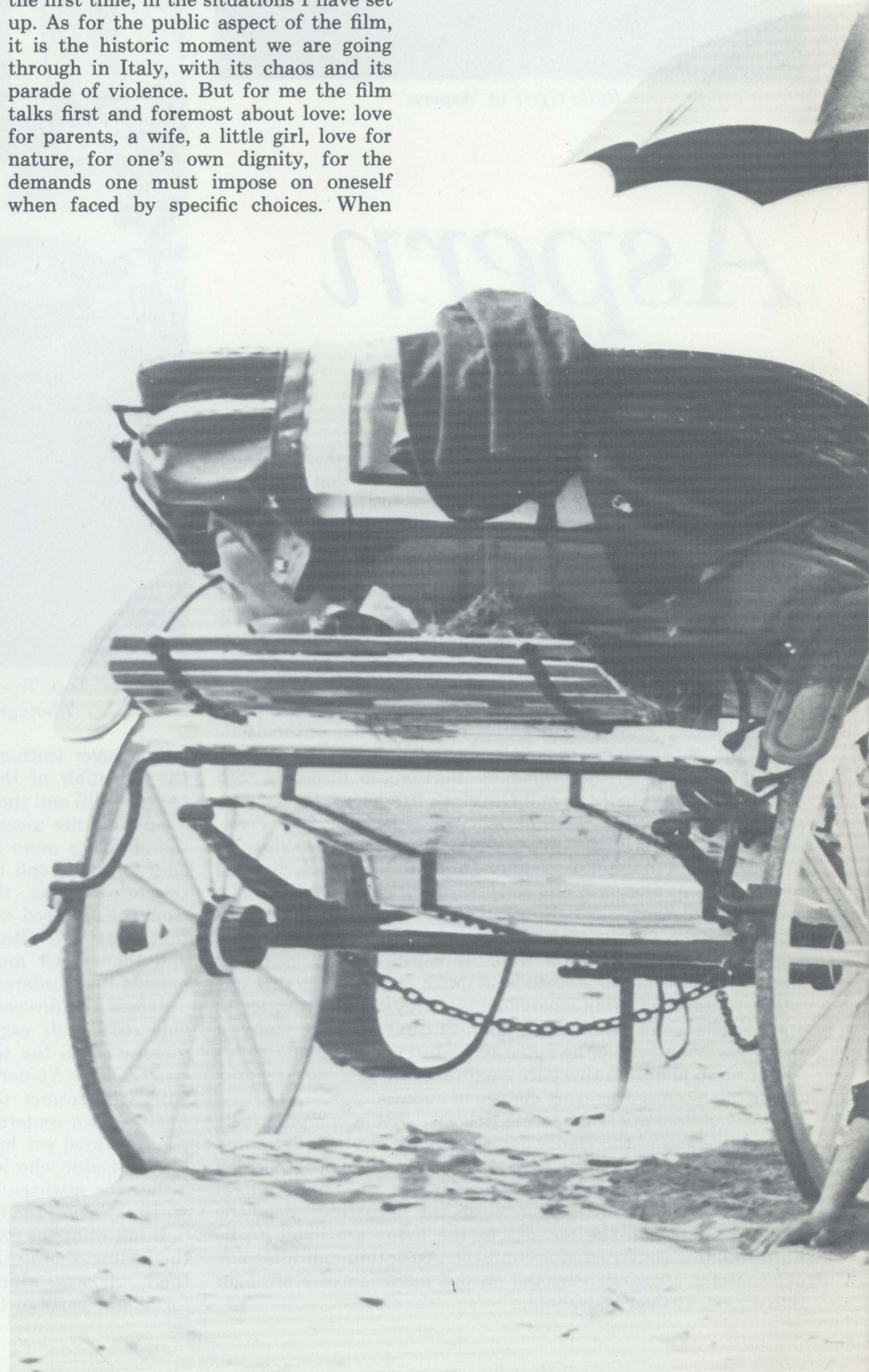
The judge, Raffaele, represents the plight of magistrates left exposed to every peril while required to make decisions on matters where the state has abdicated. Rocco, the teacher, confronts the question of disaffected youth. And Nicola, the factory worker, lives the problems of labour and unemployment. I knew my symbols also had a basis in reality because I know the choices a family from the South has to make. The father does everything he can for the eldest son and manages to send him to university. (Many lawyers, as a matter of fact, do come from the South.) The second son gets less help and stops short of university: that's Rocco. As for the third, his parents probably expected him to stay and work on the farm with them, but he finally succumbed to the great dream of the factory in the North.

Then something happened while Tonino Guerra and I were working on this subject. His wife is Russian, and he remembered a short story by Platonov that she had told him about. This story was the key which opened our own narrative, because we invented all the rest: an old man sends six telegrams to his six sons, summoning them to their mother's funeral.

Your films are usually taken from actuality (*Salvatore Giuliano*, *Hands Over the City*, *The Mattei Affair*, *Lucky Luciano*) or based on works of fiction (*Illustrious Corpses*, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, *Uomini Contro*). This time you have what is to all intents and purposes an original story. It's a new experience for you, the creation of an imaginary world.

The important thing was to find a structure; the rest was personal experiences that Tonino Guerra and I had lived through. I recognise myself, perhaps for the first time, in the situations I have set up. As for the public aspect of the film, it is the historic moment we are going through in Italy, with its chaos and its parade of violence. But for me the film talks first and foremost about love: love for parents, a wife, a little girl, love for nature, for one's own dignity, for the demands one must impose on oneself when faced by specific choices. When

Raffaele accepts his appointment to a case involving terrorism, thereby running the risk of assassination, he is not playing the hero but deciding to go on exercising his profession, which is to administer the law. For me, this is a gesture of love towards the conception he has of his own honesty, towards a certain intellectual discipline in the conduct of his life. The film may seem very gloomy, but in this sense it transmits a great ray of hope.



'THREE BROTHERS'

The film is rather like a cross between *Illustrious Corpses* (the extreme social violence, the problem of justice) and *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (the perception of nature and the countryside).

That is really the result of my experiences on earlier films. It is the sum of my work, but also of my life recently. With *Three Brothers*, I wanted to open a window on the present in which I live. I have always felt that films, even bad

films, bear witness to their times. If the average Italian film today is inferior to what it was twenty years ago, this is a reflection of the situation in which we live, where vulgarity, irresponsibility and cynicism present a façade for evading the problems that confront us: corruption in public life, the difficulty of achieving a political and social equilibrium. And in *Three Brothers*, after all, I trace my personal history through the story of my family and my native region.

How far is the film autobiographical?

I have only one brother and I have never lived in the country. I didn't know it at all before I became a film-maker, and first made contact with it through *La Sfida*. I came to understand it better while making *Salvatore Giuliano*. It was at that time, too, contemplating the Sicilian cemeteries, that I overcame the horror of death which had been handed down to me by my mother. Because in Naples death may fascinate but it is still felt to be repellent... and the fascination it arouses in Sicilians is a very different thing. In Naples I experienced nature only through the sea. But I find nothing nostalgic about the countryside, no yearning for an elegiac way of life. Quite the contrary. What it stands for is the possibility of rediscovering the tough peasant strain that exists in all of us, the values of an older civilisation. That civilisation is disappearing. The state can profess a clear conscience because it offers aid, but it's also destroying the man of the South by taking away his sense of responsibility. Many young people in the South today seek security in routine clerking jobs, abandoning all desire to work productively.

Although the context isn't autobiographical, are some of the details?

My mother died two years ago. I went to her funeral with my brother, but we didn't want our father to come with us because he was too old and tired. When we returned, we found him back at the house, sitting bolt upright in a chair. Instead of the woollen jacket he usually wore, he was dressed up like a diplomat in a grey suit, just sitting there without moving. And on his finger, where he had never worn a ring before, was my mother's wedding ring. You don't talk to old people because you have nothing to say to them. You don't know what to talk about. Last year I went to see my father and I talked to him, I tried to tell him

things. Then a silence fell which lasted for ... years. Suddenly my father said, 'We must do it quickly.'—'What do you mean? What must we do quickly...?'

He died as we were filming *Three Brothers*. I let my assistant do the shot which precedes Nicola's arrival at his wife's place with the little girl on roller-skates, and then took over again.

Why did you choose Puglia as the setting for the story?

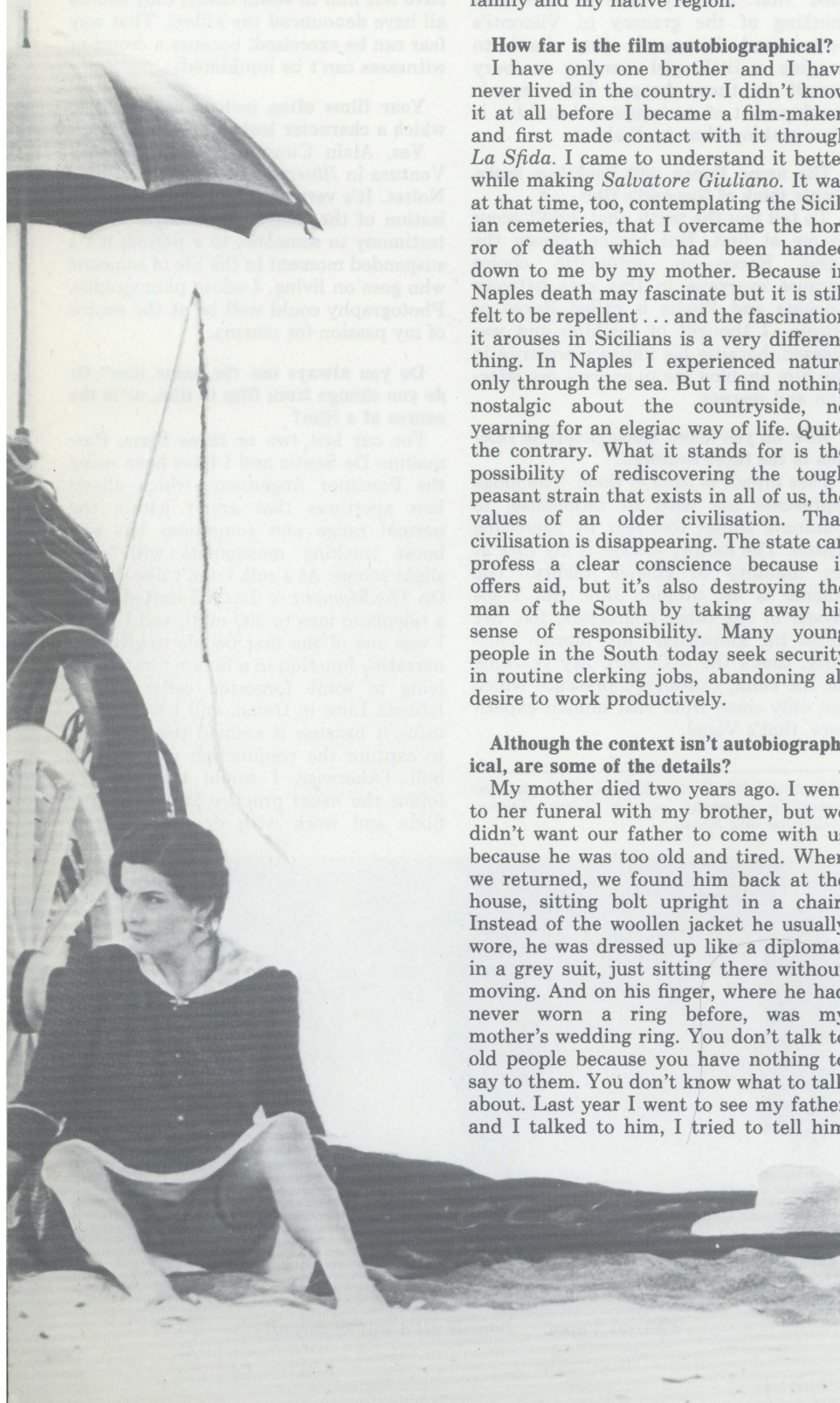
It's a very distinctive area. It's very harsh country, predominantly rocky, where the main activity was breeding sheep, goats and cattle. Not so many years ago, young people were still being sold in the market-place at Altamura, the agricultural centre for the area. This was called 'la vendita degli alani', the 'alani' meaning sheepdogs, and the farmers bought them like dogs, under contract, and used them like dogs, for herding the livestock. The landscape is quite different from the one in *Eboli*, although Lucania is very near. The inhabitants are not different; they have the same dignity, the same reserve, but there is a great gentleness in them, the gentleness one sees in Charles Vanel's face. What attracted me was the landscape, and those great white farmhouses I had seen on my travels, built of stone as durable as the peasants themselves.

It is a film about intimate relationships, yet although the temptation must have been considerable, you follow your usual principle of resisting psychology.

For me, the psychology of a film has nothing to do with the psychology of the characters; it has to do with the montage. One must understand the characters through the film as a whole, through the context in which they are placed, through the discourse which is established. I wanted to tell a story which I hoped would have the scope and thrust of a novel. I wanted to disrupt the narrative but without losing overall unity, which had to be a narrative unity. Tonino and I started to write, inventing without knowing where we were going. It was like shuffling a pack of cards. And gradually each card fell into the place that was waiting for it. When I unhesitatingly selected my three symbol-characters, I felt some resistance. It's too schematic, I was told. But I knew I could bring them to life through the *mise en scène*.

In your work there is usually a considerable difference between the finished film and the script as written. You allow yourself a good deal of freedom with respect to the script.

Shooting a film is always an ordeal for a film-maker, understandably so if one thinks of the problems to be resolved. In my case, I get up very early in the morning. When I arrive on the set, I have



already decided what I want to do, where I'll put the camera, what I want from the actors. But Vanel's contribution to *Three Brothers*, for example, was considerable. Everything he does seems entirely natural, but I'm sure it's the result of study which has had the time to mature over the years. He lent us all a sort of serenity. During filming he was like the stones of that old farmhouse, like the natural world about him; he hit it off immediately with the dog, for instance, and with the little girl, and the rhythms of the film began to adopt the cadence of his movements.

Your characters, like yourself, have difficulty getting to sleep; and in their sleep they rehearse their lives on stage.

The film has several planes. There is the present moment, then planes of personal memory, collective memory and future possibility. The most interesting thing about the narrative structure is the balance between its parts. Once we had decided to tell the story of several characters immersed in the present moment, at the same time letting the audience see where they have come from and where they might go, it was inevitable that we would end up with this representation of past, present and future. The father's memories are personal ones; Rocco's—of the arrival of the liberating Americans—belong to collective memory. But shortly afterwards, at the end of the film, we return to the present and, simultaneously, a projection into the future. The little girl gives the old man an egg, the wheel comes full circle, and where the film began with death it ends with life. In his *Utopia della Città del Sole*, Tomaso Campanella imagines an ideal city composed of concentric circles where the outer circle is inhabited by old people and children holding each other by the hand...

Rocco's dream is designed to look rather like those old 'tuppence coloured' sheets, or even certain Maoist posters.

That character, I felt, would be unable to imagine any such situation except in the most juvenile way. For him, America, Russia or even Naples assume the form of a naive daydream. Rocco is taciturn, like his father, though if the father doesn't talk it's chiefly because people don't talk to the old nowadays. No one asks him anything, and because he has great dignity, he doesn't much care to start up any arguments. It's true, too, that Vittorio Mezzogiorno (Rocco) looks very much like Vanel, and that's why I wanted to bring their profiles together in the same shot... to give the audience a physical sense of their kinship.

The shot of the little girl playing in the grain heralds the flashback where the mother is playing in the sand and loses her wedding ring...

I wanted to show a day at the seaside, which is a once a year event for the peasant. When he paddles in the sea or breathes the sea air, he does it with enormous intensity, as though he felt he were storing up reserves for the whole year. At the same time, he is afraid of

the sea. Man is a land animal, they say down there.

The business about the wedding ring was something that happened with my father, and I was going to end the film with a shot of the old man finding his wife's wedding ring on the chest of drawers and putting it on his finger alongside his own ring. I couldn't just spring this on the audience at the end. I had to prepare the ground. So we thought of this scene by the sea: he is washing down a horse, she is playing in the sand and loses her ring. The grain in which the little girl plays at burying herself of course conjures the sand. In Lucania, while I was filming *Eboli*, I visited an old farm where they had mountains of grain in which the women worked barefoot. We used that memory here—I was also thinking of the granary in Visconti's *Senso*—and it wasn't very hard to imagine a little girl wanting to bury herself in those heaps. This organic development of an image and an idea is what making films is all about.

The name Rocco will doubtless make people think of Visconti's film...*

To tell you the truth, that didn't occur to me at first. But having chosen the name Rocco—an automatic choice because everyone in this area between Lucania and Puglia is called Rocco or Nicola—I thought of Luchino and was pleased, because his indirect presence in the film enabled me to express my affection and respect.

How do you stand ideologically in relation to the three brothers?

I see myself in each of them. The judge represents my wish to rationalise, to dominate things like fear by exercising reason. The factory worker is my fury at my inability to change reality. The teacher is my utopian side. But I see myself in the other characters, too. My thirst for knowledge, my human curiosity, that's the little girl. My yearning for the calm, considered presence which can only come from vast human experience, that's Vanel.

*Rocco and His Brothers. Rosi, of course, was Visconti's assistant on *La Terra Trema*, *Bellissima* and *Senso*.



'Charles Vanel... lent us all a sort of serenity.'

The two discussions in the film about 'informing' show the relativity of ethics in politics. The judge says that terrorists must be denounced. Rocco refuses to give his pupils' names to the police. They are both right...

Rocco knows—and says—that if he denounces the boys they'll go to prison, and prison doesn't permit the re-education which is his main concern. With the judge it is a different matter: he is answering peasants who have asked him what one should do if one witnesses an act of terrorism. He tells them that the case of Guido Rossa, a Genoese workman murdered because he had denounced some killers, may suggest an answer. At Rossa's funeral, one of his friends told a television reporter that they shouldn't have left him to stand alone, they should all have denounced the killers. That way fear can be exorcised, because a crowd of witnesses can't be liquidated.

Your films often include sequences in which a character looks at photographs.

Yes, Alain Cuny in *Uomini Contro*, Ventura in *Illustrious Corpses*, and here Noiret. It's very simple: this is the civilisation of the image. A photograph is a testimony to someone, to a period; it's a suspended moment in the life of someone who goes on living. I adore photographs. Photography could well be at the source of my passion for cinema.

Do you always use the same lens? Or do you change from film to film, or in the course of a film?

For our last two or three films, Pasqualino De Santis and I have been using the Pancinor Angénieux, which allows lens apertures that aren't within the normal range and sometimes lets you boost tracking movements with very slight zooms. As a rule I don't like zooms. On *The Moment of Truth* I started using a telephoto lens (a 300 mm), and I think I was one of the first people to give it a narrative function in a fiction film. It was lying in some forgotten cellar at the Istituto Luce in Rome, and I thought of using it because it seemed the only way to capture the conjunction of man and bull. Otherwise, I would have had to follow the usual practice in bullfighting films and work with doubles. In real

settings where the space is very constricted, the Pancinor Angénieux has helped me a lot, with tracking movements prolonged by discreetly opening or closing the zoom. In *Eboli* and *Three Brothers* you don't notice these shots; they are very simple, and that's what I like, although they are difficult to do. There is a complicated shot in *Three Brothers*, when Rocco and Raffaele are talking in the bedroom: Raffaele leans on a chest of drawers, returns to his bed, then moves towards Rocco's bed. It was almost impossible to manage it in a single shot because the room was so small; only the Pancinor made it feasible. An equally difficult shot was the one in which one brother weeps at the kitchen window while the other two are seen in the distance.

What sort of lighting were you after in this film, compared with *Eboli*?

I leave it to the location to influence me. My problem is to render reality, the reality manifest in this setting, without corrupting it. Like my first lighting cameraman Gianni Di Venanzo, and his pupil Pasqualino De Santis, I was brought up in that school of cinema. When I was experimenting in my early days, Pasqualino was already with me as a camera operator. If I'm in a room, what I want to capture is the natural light in that room. The difference between the interiors in *Eboli* and *Three Brothers* is the walls. Outside, of course, the difference is one of landscape. I remember that when I said we were going back to the same region, there were some misgivings among my collaborators, who probably felt we were going to repeat ourselves. But in *Eboli* it's all parched, arid mountains or green valleys and in *Three Brothers* it's a landscape of stones. In *Eboli* the walls were grey and the light indoors was dark, with a chiaroscuro effect. In *Three Brothers* the shadows are sharply defined, the contrasts glaring. In films like mine, which try to interpret reality by respecting it, constant efforts have to be made not to destroy that reality.

You seem to be fond of very austere settings: not just the functional style of offices and assembly rooms, but even the

interiors where your characters live. You also enlarge these settings, you like to give them breadth.

That's the 18 mm lens. But it's true to say that there is a choice there. This progressive elimination of superfluous details answers a desire for synthesis. As you acquire experience, you realise that by putting too much into the frame you distract attention from what is really important. If you have a subject which demands an abundance of details, then you must also achieve a synthesis of that abundance. In most cases, though, I am trying to pare down, to concentrate. You can focus attention on two pictures hanging on a wall better than you can if there are ten; otherwise, it's the wall as a whole you are looking at.

Is your approach to music similar in working with Piero Piccioni?

When I'm preparing a film, there is usually a piece of music following me along. Even if it isn't heard in the film, it helps me in my work. When I was shooting *Salvatore Giuliano* in Sicily, I had a record-player with me and I used to listen all the time to *Le Sacre du Printemps*. I don't know why. Or rather I do: in Stravinsky's music I could hear the land and the relationship of the Sicilian peasant to it, this story of savagery and suffering. While making *Hands Over the City*, by contrast, what I heard all the time was the symphonic jazz of Stan Kenton, or Count Basie and Duke Ellington. And on *Three Brothers* my constant companion was Bach variations played on the guitar. Later on I talk to Piccioni and we analyse, we exchange ideas. He suggests things. But I would never dare to use classical music to accompany my films; Vivaldi, for example, is a constant friend, but I'd never dream of using him.

The soundtrack at the beginning of *Three Brothers*, with its heartbeat rhythm, recalls *The Mattei Affair*.

There's no music in *The Mattei Affair*; or, rather, it's electronic music. Piccioni explored every possibility of the electronic control panel, and it's one of the most interesting film scores I know. For *Three Brothers* we had a recording of a surgical operation, so it's the beating of a real heart that is mixed with the music.

At what point did you decide to open the film on those shots of windows?

I wanted to set up a location shot of the city rubbish dump in Naples, a fantastic place from which you could see the section of town built complete with high rise blocks after *Hands Over the City*. But it no longer existed, and I couldn't find any equivalent. So I thought of this wall with its windows like empty eye sockets.

Is Rocco's dream perhaps a relic of your old project to do a musical comedy about Naples?

Maybe, but not consciously. I wanted this teacher's dream to be naive in form, to represent a Utopia. It also had to do with Neapolitan popular art, with the way songs are performed on stage. The song Pino Daniele sings during the dream says that Masagnello, hero of the popular uprisings in Naples during the 17th century, has grown up and come back. The song is a crazy fantasy, as Daniele says.

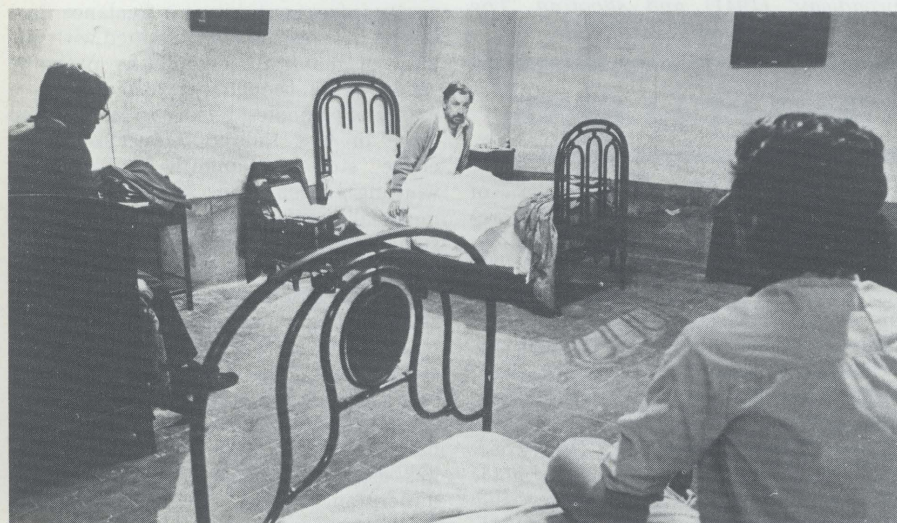
The grandmother and the little girl in *Three Brothers* end up as rather shadowy figures. It's the men who never stop explaining themselves...

That's because they are touching on topics that need to be talked about. When a judge meets his brother, a worker twenty years younger whom he rarely sees, it is quite natural that in talking about problems of such urgency to each of them as terrorism, violence and employment, they should want to explain themselves. And as a film-maker dealing with such sensitive aspects of the reality of my country, I feel such explanations are necessary. I accept the risk of seeming didactic—a charge which has been made against the dialogue between the two brothers in their bedroom. Some people feel that there is no place in a work of art for such conversations. But I don't agree, and I don't at all mind having the idiom of radio, newspapers, television, politicians or private citizens turn up as part of a film. It seems to me there is a place for it in the general economy of the work of art. Furthermore, a film is not made for a few thousand intellectuals who are in a position to read and write from morning to night. Most people in Italy live in despondency and confusion, and in dealing with current situations one must do so with clarity, and risk seeming schoolmasterish.

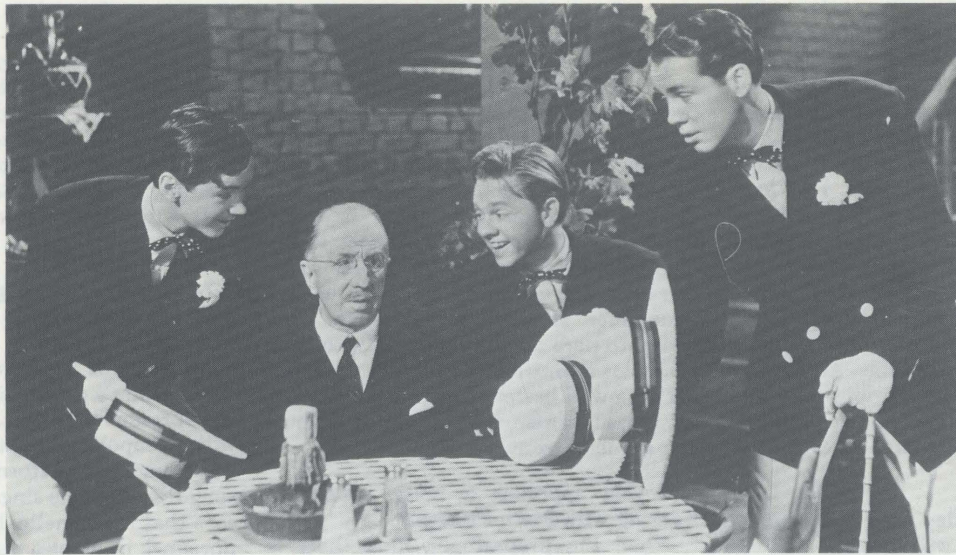
The oak tree becomes something of a leitmotif in the film.

I'll use a pompous image and say it stands for the fatherland: the age-old tree representing tradition, the family. When Rocco arrives at the house, he feels impelled to touch the tree, to caress it. But in this there is no expression of nostalgia for the past, no attempt to find in rural society an answer to the questions being asked. I think one must move forward, but without losing contact with the cultural authenticity of the past which is now under such serious threat. That is what the relationship of the old man and the little girl expresses: the notion of continuity. ■

Translation by Tom Milne.



The brothers: Vittorio Mezzogiorno, Philippe Noiret, Michele Placido.



RICHARD QUINE

the name below the title

A few issues ago (Summer 1980), *SIGHT AND SOUND* published an article on the Hollywood director Mitchell Leisen, whom Gilbert Adair characterised as 'neither hack nor authentic artist, but exactly halfway between.' Leisen's filmmaking progress, beginning in the early 30s, peaking a decade later and declining during the 50s (his last feature was made in 1957), closely and suggestively parallels that of the Hollywood industry's sound era. Not that one should make too much of this: a figure like Henry Hathaway, who began directing at much the same time (and whom, in fact, Adair cites as having occupied a position at Fox comparable to Leisen's at Paramount), continued actively right through the 60s, and it might reasonably be held that his later work is his more sustained and interesting.

None the less, the rise and fall correspondence is sufficiently telling for it to be worth asking, half a century on from the industrially halcyon days when men like Leisen and Hathaway made their first movies, what the going has been for an analogous middle-of-the-road director whose career began some halfway between then and now, at that time some three decades ago when the Hollywood empire was still going strong but visibly beginning to crumble. For such a filmmaker, in fact, as Richard Quine.

What follows is not motivated by any wish to advance grandly auteurist claims for a little discussed director, though inevitably the choice of subject reflects personal fondness and the hope of promoting recognition of Quine's skills as (at best) a distinctive *metteur en scène*. But more basically it seeks to throw an oblique light on the changing and increasingly vanishing profile of mainstream popular cinema, which with its



Richard Quine (top right) in 'Babes on Broadway' (1941) and shooting 'The Moonshine War' (1970).

TIM PULLEINE

casually ritualistic connotations of double features and twice-weekly programmes instinctively remains a touchstone for many even while it is wholly foreign to the under-25s who now make up an overwhelming preponderance of those who still actually go to the pictures.

First, the facts. Richard Quine (born 1920) was a child actor in the theatre and films and continued in adult life playing assorted supporting roles in Hollywood: one appearance was in the 1942 movie *My Sister Eileen*, the musical adaptation of which would later be one of his greatest successes as a director. In 1948, he co-

directed (with William Asher) a B-picture called *Leather Gloves* at Columbia. The studio subsequently hired him as a dialogue director, and in 1951 assigned him to direct the first of a group of second features. A few years later, Quine graduated to A-pictures, remaining at Columbia (with one loan-out) for the rest of the decade. After 1960 he freelanced for various companies, and his credits since 1970 have become increasingly sporadic. The statistics seem worth recording: sixteen films between 1951 and 1959; nine between 1960 and 1969; only three since then.

Quine can thus fairly be called a representative figure, in terms of his own generation, in the way he progressed: extensive training in the show-business ranks, an element of luck in getting a low-budget movie produced, apprenticeship in routine second features, a frequent output as a contract director, a pretty infrequent one as a freelance. Nor has he been especially identified with one kind of material. Though he probably tends to be thought of primarily as a maker of comedies, he has, in fact, ranged more or less randomly over musicals, crime stories, romantic melodramas, working much the same spread of material, incidentally, as Leisen. The one signal omission in Quine's filmography is that he has never, whether from choice or lack of opportunity, ventured into the realms of the super-production or the large-scale literary adaptation, which claimed the attentions at least once over of nearly all his contemporaries during the late 50s and early 60s. Perhaps this heightens the degree to which his career has assumed a nostalgically regressive dimension. Unlike, say, Blake Edwards (an obvious comparison, not only because Edwards had script credits on several of

Quine's 50s films), Quine's name has in promotional terms remained firmly below the title.

To return, though, to the beginning. Quine directed seven B-movies at Columbia between 1951 and 1953, all but one musicals of a sort, several of them vehicles for uncharismatic 78 rpm vocalists like Frankie Laine and Dick Haymes. The only non-musical was a Sam Katzman 'Eastern', *Siren of Bagdad* (1953), which Quine has claimed he sought to turn into a parody—none too easy a feat, one might think. It is hard to imagine that *Purple Heart Diary* (1951), produced by Katzman and starring band singer Frances Langford, can be worth making any great effort to catch up with, and the only one of these 'prentice works which, courtesy of off-peak television, I have been able to see, *Cruisin' Down the River* (1953) co-starring Haymes and Audrey Totter, is a pallid affair of no more than routine competence.

If productions such as these represent a cinematic tradition over whose disappearance it is hard to summon up much regret, the same is certainly not true of the area from which Quine's next two films sprang. These, *Drive a Crooked Road* and *Pushover* (both 1954), are the movies which established a modest critical reputation for him, and both are small-scale, off-beat crime thrillers, the unheralded kind of film which, in the days when it existed, generally offered the richest chances of critical 'discovery'. Kubrick's *The Killing* is probably the most celebrated instance, Kershner's *Stakeout on Dope Street* about the last of a distinguished line.

Indeed, *Drive a Crooked Road* and *Pushover*, neither of which was press shown in Britain, were noted in the pages of this magazine (January–March 1955) in a joint review by Lindsay Anderson. Commenting on the former's 'bite and intelligence... ingenuity and good storytelling,' he added, 'it becomes less a melodrama of speed and violence than a study in relationships.' And of the latter he observed, 'The intrigue is not always plausibly presented... Even so, the qualities of style and atmosphere are there.'

Drive a Crooked Road was clearly a project in which Quine was personally engaged. Mickey Rooney, here calculatedly cast against type in a put-upon guise, is an actor with whom Quine worked both before and since; moreover, the film's sharp, careful eye for California locales—much of it was shot on location—anticipates the otherwise dissimilar *Strangers When We Meet* (1960). Quine spoke of it in a *Cahiers du Cinéma* interview (August 1962) as his favourite film, stressing the use of exteriors and calling it 'nearly New Wave'. Certainly the real interest of the movie lies less in its story, which at the end is somewhat contrived, than in the pace of its telling and the incidental evocations with which the milieu is summoned up. More than this, however, the film's effect depends to a degree upon contradicting the implicit assumptions a contemporary audience

would bring to it, not merely in casting Rooney as a dupe or 'fall-guy' and making him the ostensible identification figure, but in the (at least until the end) undeterministic structure and 'everyday' atmosphere.

Pushover, on the other hand, seems to play consciously into the likely expectations of its audience. Part of a mid-50s mini-cycle of thrillers about crooked cops (*Private Hell 36*, *Rogue Cop* and *Shield for Murder* all appeared in the same year), it also seems to summon up the specific ghost of *Double Indemnity*, both through the broad outline of the story and the casting of Fred MacMurray. (Though, oddly enough, the screenwriter, Roy Huggins, has since claimed that he borrowed not from Billy Wilder's movie but from a lesser known film noir, *Framed*.) The fact is that—paradoxically, perhaps—a 1954 audience would probably be less apt to play at reference spotting than would one in the Bogdanovich era. At that time, well before (in Britain, anyway) the mass availability of movies on TV, the place that *Double Indemnity* had in the cinema-going consciousness would have been a largely buried one. My own first viewing of *Pushover*, during its 1963 re-release, preceded by several years my first sight of the Wilder classic.

Seen today, *Pushover* contains elements that may have the air of rather hollow pastiche, like the mortally wounded cop's final utterance from the rain-damp gutter that 'we really didn't need the money, did we?' But who is to say whether that is not because we have in the meantime been so conditioned by self-conscious imitations of the genre? What makes *Pushover* gripping, after its modest fashion, is the sureness of its fatalistic mood, the conciseness of the staging, which thrusts the audience straight into the action with an expository bank robbery conducted behind the credits, and, in more personal terms, the sensuous attention paid to Kim Novak, making both her first significant screen appearance and the first of four films with Quine, with whom, she confided in a recent interview, she conducted an off-screen love affair.

After these two thrillers, Quine returned to the musical on a rather larger scale with *So This Is Paris* (1954), and SIGHT AND SOUND continued to demonstrate its support. 'Unusually attractive... Quine shows a strong, quizzical talent,' wrote Gavin Lambert, going on to describe the film as a 'genuinely personal achievement' and to demonstrate, *avant la lettre*, an auteurist devotion in tracking down a reissue of *All Ashore* (1953) and discerning in it an approximate blueprint for the later project.

So This Is Paris, with its trio of sailors on shore leave unabashedly reminiscent of *On the Town*, is compact and engaging, with Tony Curtis adapting notably well to the role of song and dance man (a far cry from latter-day 'musicals' featuring the terpsichorean feats of such as Burt Reynolds) and the perennial 50s second female lead Corinne Calvet hamming it up as the man-hunting 'other woman'. Although the documentary

aspects of *On the Town* have been exaggerated over the years, since they really only apply to the splendid opening number, it is fair to say that Quine's movie now seems somewhat hampered by the exceptionally casual impressions of the French capital and countryside which the studio designers saw fit to provide.

Certainly it seems odd that Quine's follow-up, *My Sister Eileen* (1955), should in the course of a rather grudging review in SIGHT AND SOUND have been unfavourably compared to its predecessor. But perhaps an underlying explanation is to be found in the fact that *My Sister Eileen* was made in CinemaScope, about which in its early days several British critics seemed to harbour an almost paranoid distrust. As a matter of fact, it is the very use of the wide-screen format, combined with the *intimiste* nature of the material (only one of the numbers, and that is the finale, involves more than four people), which lends the film one of its particular attributes. There is no musical less stagey in the pejorative sense; but at the same time *My Sister Eileen* achieves a singular theatrical excitement by virtue of its discreetly distanced framing of Bob Fosse's inventively choreographed dance episodes, most memorably, perhaps, the four-handed routine in a deserted bandstand. One experiences here the direct physical involvement which can be derived from dance in the theatre, but which is inevitably rendered more abstract by the elaborate editing attendant on, say, the barn-raising sequence in *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*.

If this film also seems to look over its shoulder at *On the Town*, and the casting of Betty Garrett as the supposed ugly duckling invokes an explicit comparison, it is fully able both to absorb the influence and to deflect it, through its own styles of (Scope) shooting and (Fosse) choreography. And away from the musical sequences, Quine shows an adroit ease in animating assorted pieces of business and keeping running gags on the boil, so as to contain the action within its own cheerfully fantasised scale of reference. Arguably, his comic skills are more consistently deployed here than in some of the non-musical comedies to which he progressed.

The five movies after *My Sister Eileen* were all comedies, in a prolific medley of idioms: variations on Capra, both urban (*The Solid Gold Cadillac*, 1956) and rural (*It Happened to Jane*, 1959), 'realist' matrimonial sitcom (*Full of Life*, 1957), 'sophisticated' Broadway intrigue (*Bell, Book and Candle*, 1958), army farce (*Operation Mad Ball*, 1957). *Bell, Book and Candle* is in a sense the odd film out, with its seductive veneer of 'style', its elaborately designed interior sets and superb James Wong Howe exteriors in a wintry Manhattan, even if the basic material, involving a characteristically bemused James Stewart with a family of witches and warlocks, remains a rather heavy piece of three-act whimsy. When Quine was interviewed by Bertrand Tavernier and Yves Boisset in *Cahiers*, they told him that this film and *Strangers When We Meet* were the ones

they admired most, but that they cared less for the Judy Holliday vehicles (*The Solid Gold Cadillac*, *Full of Life*). Quine tended to concur, conceding that the latter were 'terribly American' and less personal, though one cannot altogether dismiss the unworthy thought that he may have been seeking to tell his interviewers what they wanted to hear.

At all events, it is hard to imagine a movie more severely functional than *Operation Mad Ball*. The notional setting is France just after the 1945 surrender, but the entire action, filmed in harsh black and white, takes place in studio sets, much of it at night. There are few sight gags, not even much verbal byplay, simply the elucidation of a single unlikely incident (and the unadorned quality happily extends to the absence of the elaborate animated main titles which a few years later would become virtually *de rigueur*). Nor does the film manifest any requirement to strike an iconoclastic attitude outside the immediate context: the personnel may be army medics, but the atmosphere is appreciably closer to Sergeant Bilko than *M*A*S*H*. The army here is simply a neutral background, no more 'real' than the French village to which the soldiers periodically resort, against which the successive farcical dealings occur. The most memorable of these involves a cameo appearance by Mickey Rooney as a galvanically finger-snapping figure whose high-speed utterances are heavily interlarded with useless items of general knowledge and habitually delivered in rhyme.

Certainly this film marks a distinct contrast with the visual refinement of *Strangers When We Meet*, which received little enough attention at the time but now seems quite likely to be the film for which Quine is best remembered. In his Biographical Dictionary, at any rate, David Thomson terms it the director's 'best and most personal picture', and it richly deserves rediscovery, especially when, within the same genre of matinée melodrama, critics have subjected the work of Douglas Sirk to such exhaustive elevation.

Strangers When We Meet might fairly be called ravishing to look at. Charles Lang's sinuous Scope camerawork echoes

the best magazine photography of the time, and the combination of lush visual allure with the ostensibly documentary effect produced by extensive location shooting contrives to bestow upon this tale of adultery—somehow the traditional designation seems appropriate—among well-off Los Angeles ex-urbanites at once a dreamlike heightening and a sense of concrete reality. Nowhere do these qualities fuse more remarkably than in the fluid sequence, making bravura use of extended takes, of the first, guiltily rapt assignation between architect Kirk Douglas and neighbour's wife Kim Novak at a neon-flickering beachside motel.

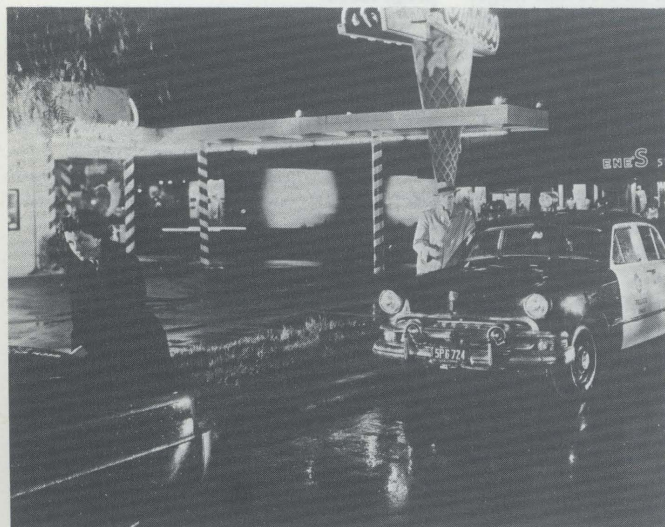
Fortuitously, too, the film's historical conjuncture serves to equip it with an apposite, and in all senses delicate, balance between creeping frankness and residual reticence: we are permitted, that is, to see the lovers in the bedroom, but not in bed. (At one point Douglas tells his wife, 'This is 1960—time doesn't stand still,' and one cannot help reflecting that he is intoning a kind of epitaph.) A sub-plot about artistic responsibility, with Ernie Kovacs as one of those annoying movie novelists, forever stumbling about whisky in hand, inveighing against the power of reviewers, seems the weakest element in the picture. But it also helps, because it edges in the direction of a particular sort of cliché, to maintain a reassuring equilibrium between the controlled contours of romantic fiction and the more elusive colourations of real life.

With its shift of tone towards the personal and its more elaborate handling, *Strangers When We Meet* might have been expected to clarify the position of its director as a potential *auteur*. This is especially so inasmuch as the Kirk Douglas character, with his ambition to achieve both emotional fulfilment and professional integrity, can be seen to represent an extension of motives apparent in more singular or negative form in earlier Quine protagonists. But no such pattern is apparent in Quine's later films (with the possible exception of the 1965 *Synanon*, his only 'social problem' movie, about the rehabilitation of drug addicts, which I have never been able to see). In the event, *Strangers When We Meet*

seems to have been less the end of a beginning than the beginning of the end.

The World of Suzie Wong (1960) occupies somewhat similar, if non-American, terrain, is well enough carpentered and even has some superficial thematic resemblances via its painter protagonist (William Holden), but it is not supported by any comparable conviction. Moreover, Quine's return to comedy with *The Notorious Landlady* (1962) was in a fairly low key. This is perhaps surprising, since besides enshrining his last collaboration with Kim Novak, the film was conceived according to the director as a joke homage to Hitchcock, and in this respect might be considered not only as alarmingly prophetic but also as the likely basis for a measure of directorial self-assertion. Self-effacement proves, however, to be the order of the day, as this quasi-parodic comedy-thriller comfortably lives up (or down) to a music score largely comprising arrangements of 'A Foggy Day in London Town', being set in a notional Mayfair where mist constantly swirls, flower sellers hover ready to be relieved by the debonair Jack Lemmon of their entire wares ('Bless you, sir'), and dear old Henry Daniell lurks threateningly, only to be revealed in the upshot as a well-meaning clergyman.

Perhaps the fact that *The Notorious Landlady* is made in almost anachronistic black and white gives it a fortuitous individuality at the same time as placing it in the vanishing context of the unassuming programmer. At any event, Quine's next comedies, *Paris When It Sizzles* and *Sex and the Single Girl* (both 1964), show alarming signs of the changing and uncertain commercial times. The former has travelogue locations in Paris and the South of France, lavish production values, much self-conscious zaniness, but virtually no structure or plot. The latter is more coy and unfunny still, with its desperately forced accommodation between old formulae and timid new morality. At least *How to Murder Your Wife* (1965) shows some recovery, managing quite adroitly to blend 60s *Playboy* fantasy with a more traditional—even, in the climactic court-



'Pushover': Dorothy Malone and Phil Carey.



'My Sister Eileen': Betty Garrett, Janet Leigh and chorus.

room scene à faire, Capra-like—comedy form.

Not a comedy, *Hotel* (1967), with its sundry sub-plots contained within the suites and salons of a New Orleans hotel, also clearly invokes an earlier tradition, and it is handled with some assurance, as well as with a deft shorthand use of appearance and demeanour. Yet *Hotel* seems oddly lost in time, in a way that goes beyond one's glum perception that, only a relatively few years on, half the cast (Melvyn Douglas, Merle Oberon, Richard Conte, Michael Rennie) seem to be dead. This has partly to do with the way the format harks explicitly back to the portmanteau movies of the 30s. But there is also a curiously self-referential element in the film. The projected overthrow of Douglas' 'personalised' standards of management by the brashly faceless organisation men mounting a takeover bid to convert the ailing establishment into an automated source of profit begins, however unintentionally, to resemble a coded *cri de coeur* for the old days of the Hollywood studio system. In a different sense, too, the rather opportunistic sub-plot involving desegregating the hotel provides an uncomfortable reminder of exactly the kind of social reality on whose suppression this sort of fiction had depended in its heyday.

If it seems strange that *Hotel* was made in the same year as *Bonnie and Clyde*, there is little doubt that the success of the latter was responsible for the inception of Quine's *The Moonshine War* (1970); and, sure enough, banjo music blares over the opening titles as a rattle-trap car bounces over the country roads. But the element of imitation in this story of crooks versus good ol' moonshiners in the Kentucky of 1932 does not prove to extend very far. In fact, the film's chief disfiguring characteristic, the shockingly mistimed intrusion of a sonorous pop song over the immediate wake of the concluding mayhem, derives from an adherence to a much more generalised current fashion, the compulsion to provide a swathe of musical packaging. Basically, however, the movie comes over as an ingenious, well told story, displaying enough confidence in its material to register as anecdotal without being

merely trivial—a quality rare enough by 1970 as to attract attention. In particular, the figure of the interloping gangsters' leader is incarnated by Richard Widmark in a performance that teasingly wraps a skein of middle-aged avuncularity around the psychopathic echoes of his younger self in the likes of *Kiss of Death*.

W (1974) is also what the trade papers used to designate a 'meller', but with a recognisably contemporary slant, since the ostensible villain, who eventually proves to be something of a victim of the ex-wife against whom he is pursuing a vendetta, is a disturbed Vietnam veteran. In fact, with its dissembling central situation and its deceptively indulgent view of life among Southern California's beautiful people, this edgy little thriller has several points of contact with *Drive a Crooked Road*. But in the era of *The Exorcist*, the introduction of Twiggy to the American screen did not prove enough of a selling point to prevent *W* getting mostly lost in the commercial shuffle, and it was five years before Quine's next credit.

Alas, if *W* invoked the work that initially won Quine attention, *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1979) macabrely seemed to extend the sense of circularity in its director's career by returning him to the most barren realms of programme fodder, except that it is difficult to believe that even *Siren of Bagdad* can have been so unredemptly unappetising as this misconceived attempt to make a vehicle for Peter Sellers out of a comic version of the vintage swashbuckler. Shapelessly scripted and with such a thrown-together air that it often looks like a rough cut, the film curiously appears to presuppose its spectators' familiarity with the original; and, leaving out of account the extent to which it unforgivably traduces the Selznick version (unlike the MGM remake of the 50s, which is merely an inoffensively inferior imitation), one doubts that any sizeable proportion of the audience would have the requisite knowledge to make sense of the farrago. In itself, the film may be no more than an unlucky accident, but because it is not an isolated exercise in vandalism—in the interim, even more hamfistedly ferocious indignities

have been visited upon Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan—it achieves the depressing feat of seeming typical of a whole harakiri approach to popular movie-making. One did not need to recognise the influence of *On the Town* on *So This Is Paris* or of *Double Indemnity* on *Pushover*, but if one did, a sense of continuity remained intact and the originals were certainly not impaired. With the 1979 *Prisoner of Zenda*, things have changed: this is cinema feeding on its own heritage for no clearer purpose than to spit out the remains.

Of course, it would be improper to seek to pin on Quine the essential blame for a project so botched in conception, just as it would be mistaken to ascribe to him more than a fair share of the credit for what are, after all, the relatively anonymous satisfactions of *The Moonshine War*. All the same, the director who brought off the bandstand dance in *My Sister Eileen* and the motel assignation in *Strangers When We Meet* cannot be considered negligible, and it would be pleasant to think that comparable opportunities might again be afforded him. A nagging doubt persists, though, that no audience any longer perhaps exists for them.

To quote Anderson's 1955 piece again: 'Going to the cinema nowadays is apt to be like dropping in on a freak show. [Quine's two films] are reminiscent of the good old days when one could visit the local in the expectation of seeing a story told in pictures ... aiming simply to please.' One cannot know precisely what sort of films Anderson was likening to a freak show (possibly early wide-screen spectacles like *The Prodigal* and *The Rains of Ranchipur*?), but it is at least questionable how freakish they might seem when set beside, say, *Friday the 13th*. No doubt, too, there is an element of truth in the received notion that the threshold of the good old days, in contradistinction to *Gatsby*'s green light, constantly advances toward us with the passing years. Yet however hard one sets one's face against ready-made nostalgia, the feeling persists that in the era of *The Prisoner of Zenda*, let alone of 'teen jeopardy', the good old days are gone beyond recall. ■



'Operation Mad Ball': Mickey Rooney and Jack Lemmon.



'Strangers When We Meet': Kim Novak and Kirk Douglas.

DAVID THOMSON

All our Joan Crawford



Photograph by Hurrell.

The T-shirts are a harsh, unstable white; it will yellow after a week in the Californian sun. The black design is stamped quickly on the cheap material. There's the relief outline of a face—jutting eyebrows, cuttlefish cheekbones, a scar for a mouth, marooned eyes, and a wounded sense of being confronted. Is it Joan Crawford, or Joan's anxiety pressed against frosted glass so that only her most peremptory features register? It is not a face, but a look, a fierceness that

the young can flaunt on their chests. There's a line to go with the look, written beneath the mask in a hand as naive and fulsome as Joan's signature: 'I never touched the bitch.' And beneath that there's a clothes-hanger copyright sign, with a credit given to the Joan Crawford Day Care Center. She died less than five years ago, time enough for the complete triumph of absurdity and camp. Joan Crawford is now a mad woman we laugh at.

'Didn't you tell me I had to make the sacrifice?'

—Sadie Thompson (Joan Crawford) to Rev Davidson (Walter Huston), in *Rain* (1932).

Strait Jacket (1964), *I Saw What You Did* (1965), *Berserk* (1968), *Trog* (1970)—the last four films of Joan Crawford, in which she plays (a) a one-time axe-murderess suspected of fresh choppings, (b) a murder victim, (c) a circus-owner whose troupe is threatened by a killer, (d) an anthropologist who discovers and loses a very destructive missing link.



'Berserk was a lurid tale of murder in the circus, and . . . she was still able to display her commendable figure in a leotard as ringmistress. "What about these?" she said, exhibiting her breasts to her producer [Herman Cohen]. "And no operations on 'em, either." She wore her own clothes in the film—"save your money, Herm; I've been hustling clothes all my life"—but she asked that Edith Head design the leotard.'

—Bob Thomas, Joan Crawford (1978)

It was in 1968, too, that Joan Crawford told Gloria Monty, producer on the daytime soap opera, *The Secret Storm*, 'Gloria, I'll play it,' when her adopted daughter, Christina, was too ill to fill her regular part—a 28-year-old housewife with a drinking problem and an errant husband.

GLORIA MONTY: Are you sure?

JOAN CRAWFORD: Yes, I'll do it. If it would help, Tina, I'd do anything . . . I know this character, it's Mildred Pierce!

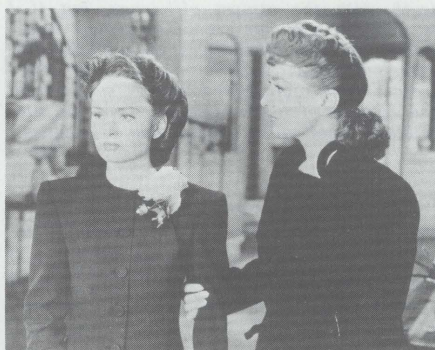
Did the person, the actress or the mother realise how close this dialogue came to the streamlined self-sacrifice of *Mildred Pierce* (1945)? If she was lost in the scenario, does that oblige us to relate Warner Brothers melodrama to the real-life dilemma of an adopted daughter who could never deter her famous mother from competition, and never win any of those competitions? Does it help us identify this subtext in *Mildred Pierce* and all the domestic weepies it represents—despair with family ideals, and a consequent need to hack at relatives?



'She was thirty-seven years old, fat, and getting a little shapeless. She had lost everything she had worked for, over long and weary years. The one living thing she had loved had turned on her repeatedly, with tooth and fang, and now had left her without so much as a kiss or a pleasant goodbye. Her only crime, if she had committed one, was that she had loved this girl too well.'

—James M. Cain, *Mildred Pierce* (1941)

Joan Crawford: the name is emphatic and assertive. Equally, the face was desperate to be unmistakable; that might eclipse its uneasiness. The look of Joan Crawford could have been designed by Freud as a mask to obliterate insecurity. It was the heart of her box-office reputation that she epitomised unprivileged women alone, determined to be strong but as vulnerable as anyone fresh in Culver City and yearning to be noticed. Such an audience wanted to see its own suburban compromises redeemed.



Top left: Crawford, Christina and Christopher. Left: Faye Dunaway, 'Mommie Dearest'. Above: Crawford in her heyday; with Clark Gable in 'Chained'; with Ann Blyth in 'Mildred Pierce'.

'We lived on — Street, where all the houses looked alike. I was always in the kitchen. I felt as though I'd been born in a kitchen and lived there all my life, except for the few hours it took to get married. I married Bert when I was 17 and never knew any other kind of life. Just cooking, washing, having children.'

—Ranald MacDougall, script for *Mildred Pierce*

The real names are so much less impregnable than *Letty Lynton* (1932), *Sadie McKee* (1934), *Mildred Pierce*, *Daisy Kenyon* (1947) or *Harriet Craig* (1950).

She was born Lucille Fay Le Sueur, before Texas required birth certificates, somewhere between 1904 and 1908. Not fixed. The father deserted the family and the mother, Anna, moved to Oklahoma, where she married Henry Cassin. Lucille's name was changed to Billie Cassin. But when she went into travelling shows as a teenager, she flipped back to being Lucille Le Sueur. Henry Cassin, too, had abandoned the family.

Under contract at MGM her name was changed. The studio used a magazine, *Movie Weekly*, to run a contest: the public had to write in a name under a picture of Lucille. 'Joan Arden' won, but lasted only a few days, for the name had already been claimed by a bit player. 'Joan Crawford' was the runner-up.

In 1929, she became Mrs Douglas Fairbanks Jr, but she remained JC because she earned more than her husband and because her father-in-law (born Julius Ulman) was already alarmed at intrusions upon the name and swagger of Douglas Fairbanks. In 1935, she became Mrs Franchot Tone. In 1942, under her legal name, Lucille Tone, she became Mrs Phillip Terry—though her new husband used his legal name, Frederick Kormann, to honour her wish for a quiet marriage. Still, Joan gave early and exclusive news of the nuptials to a key Hollywood columnist. In 1955, she became Mrs Alfred Steele. And liked the name Joan Steele.

It was between the marriages to Tone and Terry that Joan Crawford began to adopt children. In her first two marriages she had had several miscarriages, though it is unclear whether she wanted children in the early 1930s when her career called for three films a year and when the MGM hierarchy preyed upon her uncertainty. In 1930, she had won the lead in *Paid* only because Norma Shearer was pregnant.

She had been a chorus girl in Midwest vaudeville. Long after her status had settled at MGM, she had to endure rumours that in her early, difficult days she had been a prostitute and appeared in a stag movie. It is possible that the studio simultaneously denied and spread such stories, for they had conceived of Joan Crawford as a woman from the wrong side of the tracks, a hustler on the make. It was as an ambitious and not very ladylike 'flapper' that she had caught the public eye in *Our Dancing Daughters* (1928). In *Possessed* (1931), she played a factory girl who longs for

better things, falls in love with a successful and married lawyer (Clark Gable), but gives him up for the sake of respectability and that rueful amalgam of self-pity and censorship that is so crucial to the self-denial and eventual familial hatred of the women's picture.

HER: We have to get money, otherwise the future's going to be the past.

HER MOTHER: Woman's weakness is supposed to fit into man's strength. But you've got strength of your own. You can do things—not just dream about them. If you have to, get it alone.

—Katharine Brush and Lawrence Hazard, script of *Mannequin* (1938)

At MGM, she had been the protégée of Harry Rapf, a long-serving executive but the subordinate of Louis Mayer and Irving Thalberg. Moreover, in the range of studio womanhood, Crawford was in the most awkward terrain of would-be respectability, caught between the regal confidence of Garbo and Shearer and the tainted ease of Jean Harlow. That latter comparison is vital, for in her characteristic screen work Crawford enjoys nothing. She may once have been as earthy and carnal as Harlow, but her smile and her frown (always coming together) are concentrated on irreproachable cleanliness. Despite a star's wealth and comfort, and the purchase of a house to be away from a clinging mother, despite the crystallising glamour on-screen of Gothic eyebrows, Adrian shoulders and the shadowed forehead—pioneered by cameraman George Folsey on *Chained* (1934)—Crawford's appeal was to women who read advertisements in earnest faith.

Joan often felt patronised by the Thalberg-Shearer crowd. Her failed marriages seemed to signal her falling short of both Hollywood aristocracy and the New York theatre. But her marriages automatically entailed screen partnerships (one film with Fairbanks and seven with Tone), and she was teamed eight times with Clark Gable to mark a love affair that was common knowledge at the studio and a possibility established in public consciousness.

Her own emotional life was steadily exploited in her films, and her persona was developed in the stew of fan magazine writing and studio scenarios. Of course, this was the climate of stardom then, and it tangled many lives. Joan Crawford's experience may not be the most painful, but it is the one in which the woman's own needs seem most tied to her characters' aspirations. Nor should one underestimate the interaction between novelette dialogue and the terms in which a real woman thought about herself.

'I was unutterably lonely... Stories that I've always had scores of men waiting around to date me simply weren't true. I can't tell you how many nights after I put the children to bed I've stayed up alone, all alone. I am a woman with a woman's need, a husband.'

—Joan Crawford, 1955

She was thirty-five, or thereabouts, twice divorced, and suddenly, in 1938, 'box-office poison'. Her films had slumped.

Too often in the mid-30s her roles were pitched in too high a social class for Crawford to identify with. Her career needed more care than the studio was bothered to provide, and the public were perhaps beginning to regard her as a fixture.

In fact, she made two of her best films in this period: *Mannequin* (1938) and *The Women* (1939), the first the most lyrical treatment of her best dream—of a poor, conscientious woman who meets a rich, protective man; and the second her grand confrontation with Norma Shearerism, as the tough opportunist who has stolen a genteel husband. The hardness of her Crystal in *The Women* had seldom showed through on screen before, but it could not fit into conventional leading roles—unless, somehow, Joan could age appreciably and could find an emotional situation that drew on anger and bitterness.

Children may have seemed more reliable and obedient company than husbands. Crawford had been subject to odd fits of charity, and she talked about wanting to rescue 'unfortunates'. At the same time, adoption did get her publicity, and it altered the public's attitude towards her. Burningly dark in photographs, she adopted pale, blonde babies. In family pictures—which are often photographs taken for magazines—the children look washed out, while their mother, Mommie Dearest, is ablaze with excitement. She seems to have so much more need than they can claim.

Christina was given to Joan when she was ten days old, in the summer of 1939. There were many obstacles facing a prospective adopter who was a divorcée and a celebrity. Christina says she was born in Hollywood, but biographer Bob Thomas reports that Joan employed an adoption agency in Tennessee—'later exposed as a "baby mill"'—and collected the child in New York before taking her back to the Crawford house on North Bristol Avenue in Brentwood. The baby was called Joan Jr; it was another ten months before Crawford drove to Las Vegas to complete a legal adoption in which her name was amended to Christina.

'The gangsters who run the places are all urbane and charming. I had a feeling that if I opened a rival casino I would be battered to death with the utmost efficiency, but if I remained on my own ground as a most highly paid entertainer, I could trust them all the way. Their morals are bizarre in the extreme. They are generous, mother-worshippers, sentimental and capable of much kindness. They are also ruthless, cruel, violent and devoid of scruples.'

—Noël Coward on Las Vegas

Joan wanted a boy, too, and got one a year later. But the natural mother discovered that her baby had gone to a movie star and made such a nuisance of herself that Joan handed back the boy, who was then sold to other parents. Only after the marriage to Terry was a boy adopted: Phillip Jr, renamed Christopher after that divorce. Cathy and Cindy were acquired in 1947, and Joan usually treated them as twins, though they came from different families.

'"I think the Joan-Christina thing connects with the American dream of mothers and daughters," she said the other day, sitting in her light-filled Upper West Side New York apartment. "The mother does everything to make the child better off than she was. But she may not be able to. Crawford was using her own frame of reference. The girl had none, I think she held back. Crawford reached out. But the girl was a little withdrawn, cool."

—Interview with Faye Dunaway, New York Times, September 1981

'Sitting beside Veda, clutching her hand, she said: "Darling, I have to ask you something. I have to, I have to. Are you—going to have a baby?" "Yes, Mother, I'm afraid I am."

'For a second the jealousy was so overwhelming that Mildred was afraid she would vomit. But then Veda looked at her in a pretty, contrite way, as one who had sinned but is sure of forgiveness, and dropped her head on Mildred's shoulder. At this the sick feeling left, and a tingle went through Mildred. She gathered Veda to her bosom, held her tight, patted her, cried a little. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"I was afraid."

"Of me? Of Mother?"

—James M. Cain, Mildred Pierce

'I started with Christina. She is eight, a sensitive child with very blue eyes and very blond hair. She is a serious child, thinks a lot, has a decided will of her own. It is not easy to discipline her, but I am forced to, when she insists on doing things her own way. I find punishing her by hurting her dignity is very effective...'

—Joan Crawford, Associated Press interview, late 1940s

Joan Crawford died in New York City in May 1977. Her will, written less than a year earlier, left \$77,500 each to Cathy and Cindy, all personal property to Cathy, several small bequests to friends and employees, and the remainder of a \$2 million estate to charities. On the last page of the document there was a tidy assurance that nothing had been forgotten: 'It is my intention to make no provision herein for my son Christopher or my daughter Christina for reasons which are well known to them.'

Mommie Dearest was published less than eighteen months later, 'A True Story', at \$9.95 in hard cover. It is Christina's account of her home life, written in the hysterical vein of *The Secret Storm*. It tells of one battle after another, without attempt at understanding: mother's tantrums, Christopher strapped in his bed, Christina's hair chopped off because of her improper vanity, beatings with hairbrushes and ignominious wire-hangers, and the mother's nocturnal rampage in her once prized rose garden after some unknown humiliation.

It is a book about child abuse, no matter that no child was killed or physically damaged. But more than that, it is a nightmare of people cast in family situations, striving to live up to them, but unable to overcome instinctive coldness, competition and dislike. A few of Joan's former colleagues deplored the book and the film, but just as many conceded that they had witnessed moments of Christina's story in Brentwood and felt disturbed but powerless. Cathy and Cindy said they didn't know what Christina was talking about. Christopher, an electric company lineman on Long Island, given \$1,500 so that his name and character could be used in the film version, said that the book was a mild account of what really happened.

Just as it is one of James Cain's greatest insights to itemise sums of money in his blighted love stories, so it is difficult to omit figures here. The film of *Mommie Dearest* ends with a brooding close-up of Christina (Diana Scarwid) as Christopher's voice tells her to forget it all, what can they do now? It implies that the book was a comeuppance for Joan, a slap back at the grave and a way of making good the lost inheritance.

Press reports from 1978 claimed that Christina received \$750,000 for paperback rights, and \$300,000 for the movie rights. She did not go on to write the film script—as had been anticipated—and she was not consulted by Faye Dunaway. Still, those two ladies met by proxy in that their husbands, David Koontz and Terence O'Neill, were executive producers on the film of *Mommie Dearest*.

'After we had served our purpose and gotten all the publicity that could humanly be turned loose on the adoring public, we made a fatal error: we started growing up. We started becoming people. It was no longer possible to control our every thought, our every gesture, our every move. We were no longer the perfectly manipulated, camera-ready puppets that spouted, "I love you, Mommie dearest," at the slightest indication of her whimsical displeasure.'

—Christina Crawford, *Mommie Dearest* (1978)

Mommie Dearest is a wretched film. It fails to capture the moods of its key years, the 40s and 50s, in terms of film style and structure as expressions of ideology. But it can summon no better format to reconstruct this grotesque story than the half-hearted reiteration of a 1940s woman's pic. Chronology is blurred. There are too few scenes of Crawford working; too little sense of the image she was projecting. There is no adequate picture of her entourage, just one lame attendant, played helplessly by Rutanya Alda. The picture omits the 'twins' as well as the mother and brother effectively discarded by the star in the 1940s. It never attempts to understand Crawford's actions or to present any middle ground in her life. Everything is agony or ecstasy, vacillating between the equally prejudiced and emotional camps of mother and daughter, never quite brave enough to risk the irony that treats them as worthy foes.

In this article I have attempted a collage form to gain perspective on the riot of myths in Joan Crawford's life. If only the film could have resisted the spiral of melodrama, been more of a Godardian 'attempt' at a film, or followed Fassbinder's revisionary treatment of

The Women. Then it might have begun with Faye Dunaway talking about Joan Crawford rather than impersonating her.

The analytic structure begs to be employed. *Mommie Dearest* opens with a 4 am alarm clock, and the star struggling to wake in her empty satin palace of a bedroom. Without revealing her features, it follows the routine of crushed ice for her face, the studio limousine and the pre-dawn soundstage. We see the actress being made up and then, after a call-boy's 'Ready for you now, Miss Crawford,' a ponderously stupid turn into close-up that discloses ... Faye Dunaway trying to look like Joan Crawford.

The same actress made no such effort for Bonnie Parker or Eva Peron, and yet she was remarkable in both Arthur Penn's film and last year's TV biopic about the Argentinian queen bee. We never believe we are seeing Joan Crawford; we are suffering the bombast of an act of pretence, fatuous if it thinks it will deceive, but poised very interestingly on the brink of self-reflection. Apparently Dunaway was the one actress of the 70s who impressed Crawford. How much more valuable it would be to hear Dunaway wonder why than to read in the promotion for the film about the elaborate make-up imitation she undertook.

'The scandal books about Crawford make me furious. That was one of the main reasons I wanted to do this movie. They are by far not the real story. She achieved. And while monsters do achieve great deeds, she wasn't one. Crawford was a warrior.'

—Faye Dunaway, *New York Times* September 1981

Is that an echo of Dunaway as Diana Christenson, the programming executive in *Network* whose orgasm depends on ratings? That is the Dunaway role which owes most to the Crawford tradition of the postwar years: an independent woman who wants the best of everything, but who is presented through male eyes as a 'beauty' heading into the dead-ends of unkindness, lovelessness and isolation. It is the most naked period in Crawford's career and the most uncomfortable. For a decade after *Mildred Pierce*, she warriored on, her face eroding and the eyes enlarged to make up for loss, the legs still thirty, and the hopes seventeen. She was asked to play women in a torment of aging, insecure wives and careerists undermined by their hot-flush emotionalism, by the unfairness of life and by spineless men.

Sometimes her own films mocked her, without her noticing. *Mildred Pierce* is the last of her pictures in which it is possible to gaze into the bowl of fiction as if it were genuine. *Humoresque* (1946) is so much more stylised, as if the filmmakers could not overlook the incongruity of Crawford and John Garfield, the idiocy of Isaac Stern's hands reaching up out of the dark to play the violin tucked under Garfield's chin, and the overblown romanticism that has Wagner accompanying a final walk into the wild waves.

Crawford was impervious to the satire of *Harriet Craig* (1950), *Johnny Guitar*

(1954) or *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962). But being exploited added to her gruesomeness dignity; it also anticipated horror movies ten years before she was in them—*Autumn Leaves* (1956) is where tears turn to blood. There is no reason to defend her as an actress. She was more a spokeswoman for certain jittery attitudes, like a housewife in an advertisement, ready to sacrifice anything to happiness. Nevertheless, in her best films—*Mannequin*, *Mildred Pierce* and the opening of *A Woman's Face*—she is subtler and more mysteriously pained than Dunaway can contrive with fake eyebrows and exercises to duplicate Joan's mouth. When very young—even in the stilted *Rain*—Crawford had a lustrous, easeful beauty. Her misfortune was that nothing cultivated the ease, and so the eyes were left like beacons of loss.

'When I was young I had two sisters. We all lived in the same room. Never alone. That was something I grew up hungering for—just to be alone.'

—Joan Crawford in *Female on the Beach* (1955)

How can we establish an accurate life of Joan Crawford? So many trashy books have ruined the ground. But a star's life is always elusive, for it experiments with the confusion of fact and fiction. Joan's chance of happiness was lost in the muddle, but her work clung zealously to the prospect of emotional splendour and fulfilment. So far in advance of the feminist movement, Crawford had anticipated its aims (in *Mannequin*), and lived on to join in their lurid betrayal (in *Harriet Craig*).

I happened to see *Harriet Craig* recently on television. It is another grisly film, and on this occasion it was peppered with commercials. But the daytime ads on American TV—for floor polish, oven-ready meals, sanitary pads and life insurance—made a weird harmony with the story of a woman who has gone mad trying to live up to what society expects of her. *Harriet* is a frigid household tyrant, like the woman who made Christina scour the bathroom until its tiles were hot and shining from her effort.

There will never be another story like it: film stardom reached and fell from its zenith in Joan Crawford's lifetime. But fame's trauma and the advertising of fiction have spread into all our lives. The lessons of *Mommie Dearest* are multiple and frightening. They involve our simultaneous adoration of and loathing of star figures: we cherish them but we need to see their downfall—nothing else will compensate for our inferiority. The independent woman is still regarded as a self-destructive, frenzied outsider. The inner meaning of melodrama and soap opera has to do with the family as a cockpit of rivalry and vendetta. Finally, we seem unwilling to face or understand the corruption of our supposedly sacrosanct feelings by film. The travestying of Joan Crawford is nothing other than our own desperate denial of emotions we can no longer trust. The greatest legacy of Hollywood is to make us think of emotion as a sham. The revered insight has become a T-shirt.



'Mannequin' (1938): 'her best dream ...'

B RIDESHEAD

NICK RODDICK on the background to and reception of a TV adaptation that might, in a simpler age, have been a Hollywood epic

Brideshead Revisited is a wartime novel written at a time, as Evelyn Waugh reflected in his Preface to the 1959 edition, 'of present privation and threatening disaster—the period of soya beans and Basic English—and in consequence the book is infused with a kind of gluttony, for food and wine, for the splendours of the recent past, and for rhetorical and ornamental language, which now with a full stomach I find distasteful.' Granada's eleven-part television adaptation somehow reverses the process, since it was conceived in 1972, at a time when we were still just about having it so good; went into pre-production in 1976 when the current depression might yet have turned out to be a temporary setback; and reached the nation's TV screens in October 1981, by which time the desperately cultivated euphoria of the Royal Wedding could no longer even partly obscure the reality of massive unemployment, galloping cuts, and President Reagan promising Europe that, if there was going to be a nuclear war, we would be the first to know.

As Britain slid into winter, a sumptuous version of Waugh's gluttony floated across our TV sets: baskets of strawberries and bottles of Château Peyraguey ('which isn't a wine you ever tasted, so don't pretend'); effortlessly correct behaviour amid the silver chafing dishes and discreet servants of Christmas at Brideshead; wonderfully decadent Jazz Age parties to offset the arduous of clobbering the working classes in the General Strike; emotional crises against the art deco of a storm-battered transatlantic liner with the orchestra playing 'Isn't This a Lovely Day (To Be Caught in the Rain)?'; and Lord Olivier in extremis harking back even further to far



Anthony Andrews and Jeremy Irons at Brideshead (Castle Howard).

Jeremy Irons

distant days 'when unlettered men had long memories'. It may not have been distasteful, but it did sometimes seem odd.

In what now seems a simpler age, the whole project might well have been a Hollywood epic, since film versions were mooted in 1945 and 1950—a period in which, ironically, the film industry was going through a transformation very similar to that now being experienced by television. Profits were no longer automatic (the 1980-81 season was the first in history in which the independent television companies came close to their first, previously inconceivable, losses). New production formulae were being tried out, with independent or semi-independent production units operating within the framework of the monolithic studios. Executives were desperately trying to find accurate ways of gauging audience requirements and response. And, in the face of new technology, attempts were being made to grab public attention with bigger (wider, longer, more colourful) prestige productions.

The parallels are obviously far from exact, but they do exist and should not be obscured by changing stylistic norms as to what constitutes a prestige production. *Brideshead Revisited*, with a budget of £4½ million (the official figure), is the most expensive British television serial to date; though it is in the nature of inflation that the record will probably not stand long, especially since another juggernaut is already rolling out of the sheds, as pre-production work begins on Paul Scott's *The Raj Quartet*. More importantly, the present serial carries with it, not merely an aura of epic, but a sense of total commitment to the cultural values of the project which tends to place it, by its own standards and quite possibly by any standards, close to the peak of British television achievement, a visual and dramatic masterpiece of awesome proportions. In this context, it seems of

interest not merely to assess the achievement, but also to consider something of the phenomenon, looking as much at the production and consumption of Granada's serial as at the product itself.

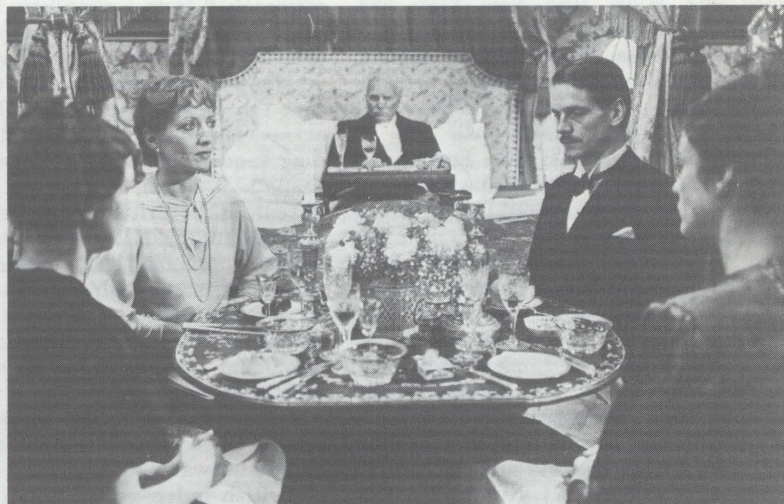
The product is, in fact, probably the easiest stage to evaluate, calling as it does for a largely unproblematic response to 'the kind of thing British television does best'. John Mortimer's adaptation is so faithful and complete that at times it seems to be not so much adapting as transferring the whole text to television. *Brideshead Revisited* is a fairly short novel (the new edition brought out by Penguin as a tie-in is 395 large-print, widely spaced pages long), and it is, give or take a few paragraphs, all there on the screen. There are, of course, some minor restructurings and inevitable omissions, but the tone of the novel has been preserved to a quite remarkable extent, thanks largely to the device of Charles Ryder's voice-over, more amply used in the earlier than the later episodes, and considerably enhanced by a voice—that of Jeremy Irons—almost indecently suited to the technique. The most striking thing about the adaptation, however, is that no attempt has been made, as it repeatedly is in American TV mini-series, to focus the dramatisation around key moments of action or interaction (which is, after all, how screenwriting manuals define 'dramatisation'). In *Brideshead*, the rhythms (and also the dead periods) of the novel become those of the television serial.

Any reservations one might have about the finished product amount to little more than quibbles. For instance, the fact that Charles and Celia make love during their tense reunion in the New York hotel after Charles' South American trip is elided to the point of being almost omitted. Charles Keating's Rex Mottram, at any rate in the earlier episodes, doesn't quite seem to be 'the embodiment—

D REVISITED



and Nickolas Grace (Anthony Blanche).



Phoebe Nicholls, Stéphane Audran, Olivier, Irons, Diana Quick.

indeed the burlesque—of power and prosperity' that both fascinates and repels Charles. The Venice sequences, however beautiful, seem occasionally on the point of turning into an insistently extravagant travelogue, as though Granada was determined we should know they actually went there to shoot them. And the transition from Charles' to Julia's voice-over at the end of Episode 6 is initially somewhat puzzling. Such things are only worth mentioning in the context of a work which is so determined to emphasise the effortlessness with which its form, if not always its content, is intended to be consumed, that lapses become insistent—dislocations through which we are reminded that it could have been done differently.

Such effortlessness is obviously one of the keys to *Brideshead*, as it was to the classic era of Hollywood, and it manifests itself in the production values. Ray Goode's cinematography is as good as anything currently coming out of Hollywood, with the added bonus of holding back on purely visual sumptuousness until moments—like the first view of Brideshead, Sebastian and Charles on the Venice Lido, or Charles and Julia by the fountain—when some magical quality is needed. Jane Robinson's costumes indicate, without anthologising, the 1920s and 1930s (though one sometimes wonders whether Julia needed to wear quite so much lamé). And Geoffrey Burgon's music, minutely varying a major theme, shifts the mood imperceptibly from wistful nostalgia to uncomplicated happiness to gathering gloom in a score whose only problem is its occasional close resemblance to his work on *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*.

But *Brideshead Revisited* is above all an actors' piece—something which the casting makes clear it was always intended to be. The central performances are uniformly perfect: Anthony Andrews' petulant ease and Diana Quick's brittle

charm provide the necessary foil for Jeremy Irons' understated and extraordinarily sensitive performance. Charles Ryder, who is the novel's narrator, is a passive and ultimately not terribly attractive character, whose own life—his marriage, his career—is simply omitted. As such, he is a more than usually colourless hero. Irons' performance, with its perfectly timed smiles and aura of constant intelligence, holds the entire sprawling fabric together. The guest stars—John Gielgud, Laurence Olivier, Claire Bloom and Stéphane Audran—do exactly what guest stars should (but rarely) do: provide an extra dimension to certain key secondary figures. They are never accorded star status in their presentation, and are quite often introduced in the background, or in long shot.

Three of the smaller performances in particular stand out. Nickolas Grace's Anthony Blanche maintains and develops what at first seems a mask of affectation until it finally becomes a crucially honest alternative to the evasive charm of Charles and Sebastian. Jane Asher brings to Charles' wife Celia a depth of humanity and suffering that I am not at all sure is even in the novel, but which adds immeasurably to it. And above all, Simon Jones' Bridey is a discreetly perfect performance which grows through the episodes, until Waugh's drab and tortured pedant slowly turns before our eyes into a fully-rounded and fascinating character. Indeed, it is perhaps the major achievement of the television version that it adds such dimensions to Waugh's characters, turning them from the occasionally schematic protagonists of a private drama into characters in a wider human crisis.

Clearly a very large portion of the credit for this must go to the joint directors, Charles Sturridge and Michael Lindsay-Hogg. Sturridge is responsible for the greater part of the serial and, insofar as it is possible to differentiate

respective styles on the basis of knowing approximately who shot what, his is the major achievement. Lindsay-Hogg's sequences are more ambitious, but often rely on framing rather than performance to convey meaning (Charles sitting alone in the gallery after Celia has left, or the earlier scene in the New York hotel when Charles gets up to open the venetian blinds). Sturridge, on the other hand, adopts an actor-centred style, focusing on minutely observed gestures and movements.

If one takes away from *Brideshead* one overwhelming impression, it is of the absolute rightness of the actors' movements, which seems better suited to the chamber drama impact of television: gestures such as Charles pausing to button his jacket before going up the stairs to lunch with Sebastian, or pulling out and smoothing down his pocket flaps after praying for Lord Marchmain's soul; and gestures like Bridey unable to respond with a direct physical move to his mother's suffering after he has dropped his 'bombshell' (that Rex is divorced and so cannot marry Julia in a Catholic ceremony), but none the less gently opening the door for her as she leaves. *Brideshead Revisited*, for all the adjectives heaped on it at the time of the first episode—sumptuous, magnificent, lavish and so on—is not an extravagant production visually or stylistically: barring one or two ambitious overhead shots (especially of Charles and Cordelia walking in the woods at Brideshead), it is soberly shot, unobtrusively edited and visually coherent. *Brideshead Revisited*, or the return of the *plan américain*.

The making of *Brideshead* could almost be a model for contemporary large-scale television production, crises and all. Granada's involvement in the project essentially dates from the winter of 1972, when Derek Granger, the company's former head of drama and the moving force

behind *Brideshead*, checked on the rights and found that Waugh's agents were still hoping for a film offer. By the summer of 1977, the status of television drama had improved enough for the TV rights to become 'available'. Granger, as potential producer, went to New York to set up a deal with WNET (the New York PBS station) and with EXXON as sponsors, a deal which was crucial to the serial's prospects, but which amounted to little more than a commitment to buy the finished product (which will air in America in January): the burden of financing remained with Granada.

The script was completed by the spring of 1978, but filming did not start until May 1979, and stopped abruptly three months later with the ITV strike. By the time work was able to resume in November, actors' contracts needed to be renegotiated, Michael Lindsay-Hogg had other commitments, the shooting schedule had been severely compromised by the change of season, and the budget began to spiral. Granada decided to continue, and work restarted under Charles Sturridge until May 1980, when Jeremy Irons left to star in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Work continued during his absence on the very few sequences in which he does not appear (mainly the Julia montage in Episode 6) and on editing the completed footage. Between August and November, Irons worked alternately on both productions, sometimes splitting days between them; the final day's shooting was 24 January 1981, when the General Strike sequence wrapped in Manchester. By the time the public saw it, *Brideshead Revisited* had been in more or less continuous production for two and a half years, and even then the later parts were still being dubbed.

The first episode, a two-hour blockbuster (all subsequent episodes, with the exception of the final one, were one-hour slots) aired on 12 October 1981, two days before the BBC's unfortunate autumn spectacular, *The Borgias*, and three days before the British premiere of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. It received an audience of around 12½ million, though viewing figures apparently slumped slightly when, an hour and twenty-five minutes in, BBC1 struck back with *A Man Called Horse*.

So much for what, when and how. Why is a different matter—why, that is, anyone should assume that a mass television audience would be interested (an assumption which proved to be true) in the obsessive carryings-on of a group of decadent, somewhat perverted aristocrats, living between forty and sixty years ago in a milieu remote from the experience of all but a tiny section of the television audience, and concerned with issues—notably 'the operation of divine grace on a group of diverse but closely connected characters'—not so much remote as virtually incomprehensible to most of even the handful that might have been able to relate to the background.

Brideshead Revisited may have been Waugh's most popular novel ('the most romantic and the most accessible,' as

Granger puts it), but the correlation between the public for a novel and a television audience is virtually nil. What is more, Waugh's concerns—the demise of the aristocracy, male love, and Grace—are not usually the stuff that TV is made of. The question can, of course, be approached from a simplistic ideological angle. Nostalgia—the reassuring version of history—is always especially seductive at times of depression. But to suggest that the serial, like the Royal Wedding extravaganza (and the Son of Royal Wedding sequel which is beginning to take shape as I write), is a device calculated to reunite the British public and obscure the bankruptcy of leadership is a piece of wishful paranoia and, besides, is not really consistent with the history of the serial's production. There is an element of truth in this but it is on a more general level, and cannot really be cited as a specific cause.

A far more instructive approach is to see the phenomenon of *Brideshead* as a bizarre but valuable key to the economics of British independent television. Commercial television, the accepted version goes, relies more heavily than the BBC on audience ratings because it has to sell advertising space. Such an attitude is obviously based on the assumption that British TV follows the American model, in which audience figures have the status of holy writ, since a one point drop in the ratings can result in a \$250,000 drop in advertising revenue and the sack for droves of programme executives.

In Britain, the situation is rather different. Derek Granger asserts, for instance, that 'the ratings do not, in the end, matter to us.' Though this is not entirely true—high ratings result in the price of advertising slots being adjusted upwards—it is not hard to say why such an attitude is possible: it is backed up by even the most cursory analysis of British television geography. Except in those small areas where two ITV channels can be received, independent television companies are, quite simply, not in competition with anyone for television advertising revenue. What is more, the franchise system reinforces this, by making its decisions on the basis of public service rather than popularity. In terms of artistic freedom, the independent companies are in fact *less* constrained than the BBC, 'swimming,' as Granger puts it, 'in a sea of honey.'

There is clearly nothing new about this—we have known for years that British television, to the amazement (though not, as we sometimes like to think, the envy) of the rest of the world, still operates on a Reithian model, which the 1956 uprising did nothing to change. But it is a situation which has implications that are not always clear, and which *Brideshead Revisited* brings into sharp focus. As the viewing figures for the first episodes show, a very large proportion of the British public has been watching the serial, and though the figures may change in the coming weeks (I write at the beginning of November), a marked upsurge for Episode 3 suggests that this is unlikely.

What this seems to indicate is that the

American view of British television, dependent almost entirely on Masterpiece Theatre and other prestige productions, is disarmingly correct: the British public is not so much having culture rammed down its throat as enthusiastically lapping it up. Obviously there are provisos, the most important of which is the immediate competition: BBC1's main competitor in the Tuesday 9-10 slot is *Play for Today*, which can be expected to appeal to the same kind of audience as *Brideshead*; the same is true of BBC2 in general. Other people may have preferred not to watch TV at all. But, within the context of the economic structure referred to above, this is a choice of limited value, a kind of abstention which has no real influence on television planning and relatively little on advertisers. High Culture, if packaged and sold correctly, sells well—something which media commentators often prefer to ignore.

Television in Britain is, of course, on the verge of a major transformation through video cassettes, subscription TV and satellite transmissions. But as things now stand—and are likely, on the basis of the American experience with alternative models, to stand for another three or four years—certain interim conclusions can be drawn. In the first place, I suppose, if culture is going to be swallowed, we should be grateful that it is of so high a quality. Secondly, British television has, over the past few years, given us a very specialised image of the history of the inter-war years, via *Edward and Mrs Simpson*, *The Mitfords* and now *Brideshead Revisited*: an image, not of social and economic upheaval, but of dynasties into whose destinies historical events are woven on a distinctly secondary level: in *Brideshead*, the General Strike, Kurt's death in the Nazi concentration camp, and the parallels between Rex Mottram and Mrs Simpson.

The historical novel, rarely about history, dies hard, and with *Brideshead* we have a classic model, complete with a first-person narrator to guide us through the events. Such an image, with its tacit assumption that the ruling classes are more interesting, tends paradoxically to deny the existence of social class as a central part of the British experience: these people, like the heroes of classical tragedy, can stand for us all. Clearly, the relative absence of literary accounts of working or even middle class experience is not something for which television can be held responsible, but nor is it something which TV is making any real attempt to change.

Finally, the stylistic seamlessness of *Brideshead Revisited* consecrates a long-standing tradition of representation in which audience response is largely predetermined: the path is smooth and even if some of the places visited may be awkward, the journey itself is not. After an early period of experimentation with live drama, television seems to have settled down to a mode of (filmed) representation as perfectly sutured as anything Hollywood ever achieved. The signs are that a return to Tara may no longer be possible, but that British television has a good few *Bridesheads* left to visit. ■



Danny Ciello (Treat Williams, second from right) and his SIU colleagues.

Knife in the table

Prince of the City/John Pym

Twenty years ago, Katharine Hepburn, Ralph Richardson, Dean Stockwell and Jason Robards played out, unforgettably, the tragic self-destructive saga of the Tyrone family. The small fact that in remembering the film one first automatically recalls the players is a significant credit to the self-effacing skills of their director, Sidney Lumet. The film transcription of *Long Day's Journey into Night* was faithful to the letter, it ran its full uncinematic length, each act ended on an eloquent fade, yet it was also decisively unstagebound. Lumet recognised, one imagines, O'Neill's rock solid craft, that an effective transposition called for no tinkering: in long unbroken takes, the players were allowed to run with their lines. The film was a measure of Lumet as interpreter.

Serpico (1973), the story of a cop who stands up to corruption in the New York Police Department only in the end to be beaten down by the freemasonry of his colleagues and forced into retirement in Switzerland, seems on one level to pair naturally with Lumet's new film *Prince of the City* (Columbia-EMI-Warner), the story of another, canner cop who exposes corruption in the NYPD but remains, despite the ruin of his life, stoically on the force. However, perhaps because of Lumet's deceptively blank professionalism when dealing with material which chiefly requires simply to be told, the film which seems in a way a more authentic companion piece to *Prince of the City* is *Long Day's Journey*. One might add, too, that both these films are marked by a tone of high seriousness—although the former has the odd curlicue which aligns it with the visceral *Serpico*—and that both bore deep, though from different

angles and to different ends, into the inexorable process of 'family' betrayals, the drug addict's pathetic plight, the tragic inevitability of hurting if not actually killing the ones you love.

Prince of the City is Detective Danny Ciello's long day's journey: another confessional outpouring (the film is based on a true story by Robert Daley, and Treat Williams, who plays Danny, spent time with his original, Bob Leuci), another purgatorial ending, and a false catharsis leaving one with the bitter reminder that nothing has really altered. Danny, a leader of one of the police department's Special Investigation Units, is summoned to a meeting with a mild District Attorney working for the Chase (read, Knapp) Commission into police corruption. This brief encounter, at which no pressure is laid, sows a doubt in Danny's conscience and, despite his instincts, he soon finds himself sealing a Faustian bargain with Cappalino, the DA, and his Ivy League associate Brooks Paige. He agrees to co-operate, but refuses in hopes of preserving his code of conduct to finger his friends and partners. He absolves himself by confessing, with that practised facility for half-truth which, it is suggested, marks the testimony of all policemen, to three misdeeds in his eleven years with the department.

Lumet and his co-screenwriter Jay Presson Allen etch the stages by which Danny, a volatile man who loves his work, partly for the solidarity it breeds, partly for the sense of distanced superiority it engenders (his overview of a corrupt society is, he believes, complete), is forced finally to come to terms with himself, to betray his friends and admit that he himself has committed many of

the crimes of which he has accused others. His nemesis comes when, having broken his own code, he finds that he is still considered a reliable witness. In the eyes of the judiciary he has, it seems, been redeemed by his courage. Now an unglamorous police instructor, he faces a class of rookie cops: a streetwise man, his own younger self, enquires if he is *the* Danny Ciello, and then, when Danny remains silent, stalks out of the presence of a traitor.

Whereas in *Long Day's Journey* the process of confession was worked out in the course of combative conversations or emerged in long monologues in which ancient duplicities and miserly secrets were finally brought out into the dim light of James Tyrone's summer house, in *Prince of the City* the duplicities and secrets are prised out of Danny in a series of staccato encounters, which take place in what seem forever like makeshift surroundings, by a series of sleek lawyers. (They are men who have achieved the sort of security that, in different circumstances, James Tyrone might have envied; Danny Ciello, being of a later immigrant generation, has passed envy and can now see these men for what they are—no different from himself, beneath their expensive suits.) New players keep entering the act, Cappalino and Paige pass on to plusher jobs, compelling Danny to reveal a little more. What he fails to recognise, and what the film brilliantly lays out, is that the process of confession, as the Tyrone family all knew, was unstoppable once begun.

Running against this confessional stream is another more conventional but no less well-executed narrative drive (and here one is reminded of the technician who directed *The Anderson Tapes*): the process by which Danny, nonchalantly wired for sound, entraps the villains who, in this film of blurred frontiers, are not quite villains even though they give off whiffs of almost palpable menace. The characters in *Prince of the City* (and the film is cast with exemplary, unostentatious care) are grouped into professions: each group is composed of individuals who beneath their individuality are in fact the same. The cops look like the mafiosi; the FBI men are all instantly recognisable; the lawyers are united by the cut of their suits. And part of the film's point is that all professions have their laws, their ways of justifying the unjustifiable: in short of making the system, which Leuci through the filmmakers suggests is teetering on the brink of anarchy, work for the individual, whatever his aspirations.

Danny Ciello is an actor in some sprawling unscripted drama: his lines are on tapes which have been inefficiently indexed and now, months later, are sometimes indecipherable. Like James Tyrone, he wanted to play the Prince (the film's title is the in this case ironic nickname given Danny and the other elite members of the SIUs); like James Tyrone he ends as a broken secondary player in some unimportant repertory house. □

FILM REVIEWS

The hope of things to come

Three Brothers/Jill Forbes

A generation after *La Terra Trema*, on which he was Visconti's assistant, Francesco Rosi has again looked at the state of the Italian federation by tracing the fortunes of the three sons of a peasant in the Puglia region whose lives mirror the development of post-war Italy. This trio spans a generation. The eldest son, Raffaele, was sent to university and now, aged fifty, is a judge in Rome where he lives with his neurotic wife and surly student son. The family resources did not stretch to university for Rocco, the middle son, so this devout unmarried Catholic of forty now works as a teacher in Naples where he looks after delinquent boys. But the youngest son, Nicola, aged thirty, is the real rebel. He should have stayed in the south to take over the farm from his father, for there was no money to educate him. Instead he left for the car factories of Turin, and there married a northern girl by whom he has a small daughter, Marta. Such a diaspora shows how Italy has changed. The poverty of the *mezzogiorno* and the speed of the rural exodus have not simply bred a generation of emigrants, production line workers in the north or in Germany. The time-honoured practice of primogeniture also underpins the class structure of modern Italy, and so typical are the members of this family, so perfectly complementary the fates of its sons, that it might almost be the text for some sociological tract in which each brother is a statistic made flesh.

Rosi has said that he wanted to make a film 'about' Italy. This is a concern he shares with most of his contemporaries, as though the cultural identity which was forged by the education system in more elderly nation states skipped a stage in Italy and entered film form before it became a reality. Even so, it is not quite Rosi's first attempt in the genre. Both the early *Salvatore Giuliano* and the recent *Christ Stopped at Eboli* addressed the problems of the south and of history.

But *Giuliano* showed the road Rosi was to travel for almost twenty years, in adapting the gangster movie to Italian circumstances, perhaps as a metaphor of Americanisation, taking contemporary subjects and packaging them in Hollywood style. *Eboli*, on the other hand, probably was a new departure, something of a return to Visconti, though less in its subject matter than in a certain conception of pace and a kind of rigorous exoticism which derives from neo-realism. But what Rosi does not have is Visconti's ability to handle emotion or to paint a broad canvas, nor can he command the aristocratic *superbia* which can claim to represent a cultural totality.

Without epic pretensions, therefore, *Three Brothers* (Artificial Eye) confirms Rosi as a 'genre' film-maker, but more in the sense one might talk of genre painting than of film genre. This is not, in other words, a clever exploitation of B-feature material, but a piece of poetic intimism retailed through a series of brilliantly constructed and highly obtrusive fictions. For *Three Brothers* is the remembrance of things past and the hope of things to come, but the present is, for the most part, a device, the slenderest possible thread whereby a tale may hang.

The old father functions chiefly as memory. He recalls his wife just before she died. Lying on his bed the night before her funeral, unable to sleep, he remembers their wedding day and their honeymoon by the seaside. It is a trip which furnishes one of the most memorable scenes in the film as well as two of its central images: his young wife loses her wedding ring on the beach; he recovers it by sifting the sand, and ceremoniously replaces it on her finger, repeating this gesture in the final frames of the film but slipping the ring this time on to his own finger. The ring of continuity in the shifting sands of time, looking to the future through the complicity he establishes with his granddaugh-

ter Marta, who is there with her father.

But if age and youth are relegated to irresponsibility, forbidden to attend by the graveside, the three brothers assume the burdens of the world. Lying side by side in the communal bedroom they had as boys, after a day's vigil at their mother's deathbed, they dream, each one in turn, with fearsome symmetry. The device is neither surprising nor annoying. It is already prefigured in the way they were brought together, each receiving a telegram from their father, recalling in modern guise the prologue to so many folk tales, preludes to fratricidal warfare. It merely serves to underline how far *Three Brothers* departs from realism. But here class warfare has replaced more primitive struggles, for each brother has entered a key institution of the modern state and each sees his intervention therein as essentially political.

Raffaele, studying an album of photographs of murdered dignitaries, imagines himself gunned down in a bus in Rome because he has agreed to serve as examining magistrate in a terrorist trial. Nicola sees himself visiting his estranged wife in Turin, swallowing that southern pride which was hurt by her brief affair with another man, and climbing into bed with her. Rocco imagines himself as a cross between the Pied Piper and Julie Andrews, leading a band of sweetly singing children in a dance routine with brooms to sweep the streets of New York, Moscow and Naples. A philosopher, a realist and a utopian. Each brother, in his own life and in his own way, confronts the problem of consensus. Should one bear witness? Yes, says Raffaele, otherwise the foundations of the state are destroyed; no, says Rocco, who refuses to betray his delinquents to the police; no, says Nicola, who defends the worker's right to withdraw his labour.

Does this mean that Raffaele is definitively at odds with his two younger brothers? It is true that the character is not altogether satisfactory, perhaps because Philippe Noiret, though he looks the part, remains a foreigner in an Italian film (as Charles Vanel, as the father, does not). It is also the case that immediate sympathy with Nicola's more mundane concerns (what does he now feel towards his village, who will have custody of his daughter?) makes him a more accessible character, while Rocco is obviously the key sensibility in the film since it is his memory of post-war liberation that we are shown, and it is his nightmare which opens the film. But it is also the case that Rosi has not made a conventional political film. The very obvious formalism of *Three Brothers*, the pleasure taken in the distortions of time and the creation of a variety of fictions, mean that it elicits a diversity of responses which prevent national unity and family identity being reduced to a simple equivalence. In fact, this is both a highly personal film, a mosaic of individual memories, and a modern folk tale whose open-ended narrative stops short of the crude closures many others have succumbed to in Italy. □



'Three Brothers': Marta (Marta Zoffoli).



'True Confessions': the Spellacy brothers (Robert De Niro and Robert Duvall).

His brother's keeper

True Confessions/Richard Combs

Given its racy title and the high-voltage billing of Robert De Niro and Robert Duvall, the mood of *True Confessions* (United Artists) seems strangely negative. One might almost say withering, since it begins and ends—one of its few actively metaphorical images—in the desert, where the Spellacy brothers, Catholic priest Des (De Niro) and homicide cop Tom (Duvall), meet some fifteen years after the main action of the film. What the desert signifies is a levelling of all the worldly vanities sandwiched between this prologue and epilogue, a spiritual transaction that is clinched in the dialogue between the two brothers. Tom apologises for what he did as a policeman that indirectly resulted in Des being cast out of high church office and landing in this dry place; Des replies that the fall was his salvation, that in the desert he learned the meaning of being a priest. Having admitted that he is dying, Des takes his brother to the parish graveyard to point out the plots he has set aside for them both. "This is it?" Tom laughs, as a rising crane shot, the final leveller, abandons them among the grave markers. The question perhaps ironically echoes Brigham Young's famous declaration of where he would found a religious citadel in the desert—a 'theological irony' of the kind with which, in his novel, John Gregory Dunne sums up his murder story: 'It was not every monsignor who was undone by a dead Christian Scientist.'

The scene, in fact, is close enough to Dunne's book, which he and his wife Joan Didion have adapted by cutting back details and characters as far as the story is concerned, but preserving all the religious reference points, the dryness of tone. One suspects they produced a screenplay designed to be director-proof, in which not only moral ambiguity but character description would be rooted in literally parochial business, the running of a Southern California archdiocese, circa 1946. In the event, they have almost

succeeded—for one thing because the film is so indifferently directed by Ulu Grosbard that the images seem to be constantly receding, wiped clean of personality in the same withering desert climate. The film survives as a theological conundrum—about the cop with the instincts of a priest doing the wrong things for the right reasons, and the priest with the instincts of a politician doing vice versa—embodied in two actors who, in De Niro's case at least, must act contrary to our expectations, must *be* in the Bresson sense rather than act in the Scorsese sense on the way to receiving final grace.

In sheer story-telling terms, however, it is interesting that the novel of *True Confessions* is racy in just the way the film is not. It builds its portrait of the Spellacy brothers through an accretion of detail, a web of circumstantial evidence and petty corruption which both in the end see as drawing together all the threads of their personal and professional lives. Deprived of this context, the film can only work through some limited dramatic parallels. After the brothers' reunion at the beginning, the film dissolves to a long track up a church aisle as Des Spellacy officiates at an elaborate wedding ceremony, under the slumbrous gaze of Cardinal Hugh Danaher (Cyril Cusack), whose ambitious chancellor he is. The bride is the daughter of Jack Amsterdam (Charles Durning), a building contractor whose gangsterish reputation has been overlooked while he and the church have traded favourable construction contracts for patronage of the archdiocese.

Intercut with this is the arrival of Tom Spellacy and his partner at a brothel where a priest has died while committing a mortal sin. The madam is an old acquaintance of Tom's, and while the corpse is being smuggled out, she lets him in on a secret that ties up one of those threads. In the days when he worked on the vice squad, Tom doubled

as Jack Amsterdam's 'bagman' (collecting pay-offs), and the reason he was transferred to homicide rather than being indicted was so Amsterdam could preserve his fledgling relationship with the church and Tom's brother. More lines begin to cross during the murder investigation of Lois Fazenda, would-be actress (an Arab bit-part in *Casablanca*) and prostitute who is found cut in two. She also turns out to have been a pawn in Amsterdam's dealings—and once to have innocently encountered Des. As Tom bears down on Amsterdam, in mounting disgust at the corruption that seems to spread from the contractor to everyone he knows (though Amsterdam's innocence of the murder is soon proved), Des himself seems certain to be ruined by association. But the monsignor, weary of being the cardinal's wheeler-dealer, comes almost to welcome the prospect. As he tells his brother, 'Something's got to change in my life. I'm tired of fixing things.'

This last scene is an invention of the screenwriters rather than the novelist, another instance of the brothers being explicitly paralleled, this time in ironic reversal of the confessional situation. The trouble is that, deprived of the novel's surrounding detail, the relationship loses in psychological complexity as it gains in a sort of theological clarity. The film almost works by a suppression of detail, creating a sense of void in and around the Spellacy brothers—certainly an unfulfilled spiritual need between them—which leads naturally enough to the renunciation and resignation of the framing desert scenes. What Dunne and Didion have preserved is a skein of minor details, which connect up again as mordant asides on the corruption of the flesh: the rose tattooed on the murdered girl and the name, Santa Rosita, of Amsterdam's latest real estate operation; the ethnic humour about bowel complaints and the fact that one or two of the main characters (Des, Amsterdam) are actually sickening unto death.

But what one misses, in dramatic terms, from the novel is the buttressing presence of such characters as Tom's comically ambitious superior Captain Fuqua, his religiously demented wife Mary Margaret, or his lover-in-suspension Corinne. Nor does the film compensate at all by working in terms of the genre which it seems to occupy. The opening wedding party, with its sentimental dance music counterpointed by elliptical business talk, suggests a quote from *The Godfather*. But the film resists being understood in any terms except its own faintly sentimental abnegation. One need only imagine how directors as similar beneath religious shades of difference as Scorsese and Paul Schrader might have developed such an interchange of worldly priest and penitent cop. *True Confessions*, in a sense, is its own abnegation, which makes it both intriguing and self-defeating, not least in the strange burden it imposes on an actor like De Niro, to be passively read rather than actively revealed. □

FILM REVIEWS

In the bayou *Southern Comfort*

Tim Pulleine

There are general as well as particular grounds for greeting Walter Hill's *Southern Comfort* (Columbia-EMI-Warner) as the most striking American mainstream picture to reach us for some little while. At a time when commercial films of any ambition often seem to be no more than pointless revisions of earlier models, here is one which marries the traditional energy and economy of the action movie to material both apt and unfamiliar. The substance may appear comparatively slight and predictable, but the treatment, in both script (by David Giler, Michael Kane and Hill) and realisation, evinces an unshowy originality that conveys a bracing shock of pleasure.

The setting is the Louisiana bayou and the principals are an eight-strong platoon of civilian National Guardsmen participating—in some cases with a show of mock-soldierly probity, in others with grudging disdain—in field manoeuvres. Seemingly lost, they stumble on and purloin some canoes; when the owners, French-speaking Cajun hunters, angrily appear, the most moronic of the Guardsmen contemptuously fires blanks at them; the Cajuns respond with a live fusillade, killing the sergeant nominally in command of the group. What follows is a variation on the 'and then there were none' formula, with the unseen band of swamp-dwellers pursuing a monstrous vendetta by ritually picking off the increasingly demoralised intruders as

they try to flounder their way to safety.

Clearly enough, the shadow of a 'big subject' lurks behind the graphic surface. Even without the episode in which the Guardsmen chance upon an ambiguously unaligned Cajun and seize him as a prisoner of war, the contours of the situation—the motley band of militia, most from poorly-off backgrounds, one periodically puffing a joint, confronting in an alien jungle landscape the fiendish depredations of an atavistic foe—can hardly fail to summon up the spectre of the Vietnamese experience (and the action is pointedly dated 1973).

But the triumph of *Southern Comfort* is exactly that it retains an independent life so as to resist confinement within the facile demands of allegory: the overtones deepen the effect but are never a prerequisite of it. In fact, in its vivid functionalism, as well as its regional specificity, the movie, Hill's fifth feature and his most wholly achieved work, reaches back to its director's debut, *The Streetfighter* (1975), though with a considerable gain in sheer fluency.

The distinctiveness is partly a matter of visual compression: the tenebrous enclosure of the locale is never elaborated at the expense of the dramatic action, but rather imposes itself through the variations of editing and in the audaciously restricted, olive-drab palette of Andrew Laszlo's camerawork. Equally, however, it derives from the film's human components. Using players unfamiliar not only as names but as faces, Hill presents a gallery of laconically rounded portraits worlds removed from the lay figures who might pass muster in a liberal tract or old-time patrol movie. And from the one established performer, Keith

Carradine, he gains an embodiment of the central character, the uneasily pragmatic Spencer, the cracks in his composure not quite concealed by a veneer of mocking 'cool', of an imaginative penetration for which nothing the actor has hitherto done on the screen has quite served as preparation.

Allied to the implicit disquisition on the paradoxes of leadership and individualism, the inference of a semi-satirical social profile of what Spencer terms the 'New South' which arises from these caustically persuasive redneck cameos reinforces the subterranean link between Hill's film and a key literary progenitor of the patrol genre, Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*. Indeed, the character who arguably acts as the film's identification figure, the engineer Hardin (Powers Boothe), represents a kind of inverse shadow (and the disparity might in itself be seen as an index of changing times) of the roughly corresponding figure of Lieutenant Hearn in Mailer's novel. There, the character is a defeatist left intellectual from a moneyed family; here, Hardin, explicitly addressed by Spencer as a 'college boy', would seem to be a self-made anti-idealist.

But if a comparison with Mailer points up the film's thematic density, on the formal level a specifically cinematic one presents itself, namely the neo-Gothic horror story, even if *Southern Comfort* is in its displacement of elements from that form a good deal more satisfying than almost any of the many recent movies which have treated the mode head-on. This dimension suggests itself in the gruesome, quasi-supernatural overtones of the latter half, such as the sudden emergence, as if from nowhere, of a pack of ferocious dogs, or the appalling moment when the members of the dwindling band come face to face with the disinterred corpses of their former comrades.

The same tendency asserts itself more complexly at the start of the movie's final phase. Hardin and Spencer succeed in reaching the apparent safety of a country road; a truck draws up and the friendly Cajun offers them a ride. The audience's response is here ingeniously manipulated to take advantage of an apprehension, inculcated by pictures like *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, that when helpful drivers offer escapees a lift, it is invariably to take them to somewhere they would prefer not to be. The climax is in fact extended considerably beyond this point, in a passage which—legitimately all but dispensing with dialogue and incorporating from realistic on-screen sources the disconcerting rhythms of Ry Cooder's folk music accompaniments—corkscrews the narrative into a bravura pattern of near-abstract alarm. But in choosing to extend, and transcend, current generic conventions, rather than opting like so many of his contemporaries merely to resurrect those of the past, Hill provides a reassuring reminder of the popular cinema's continuing capacity for relevant self-renewal. □



'Southern Comfort': A motley militia band on field manoeuvres.

Housekeeping with Hitch

The Janitor/Richard Combs

Breaking Away, the first collaboration of writer Steve Tesich and director Peter Yates, was the kind of unassuming 'little' film which wins critical plaudits for promoting character over plot and not messing with ambitious structural or thematic ideas. What now seems most remarkable about the film is that it so unabashedly curries favour for most of its length as a reread of *American Graffiti* (four adolescents hesitantly facing Life, to be or not to be collegiate), before introducing a single structural idea: the parallel plight of the hero's father, who as a skilled stonecutter helped to build the college which he and the other lower middle-class 'townies' now feel is too good for them. *The Janitor* (Fox), not such a simple kettle of fish, is unlikely to receive such simple endorsement. To begin with it is a thriller, so that the human observation with which Tesich found it so easy to mop up the opposition in *Breaking Away* immediately has to be accommodated with other concerns—structure among them. And what is striking about *The Janitor* is a profusion of structural ideas, of thematic patterns, that almost make it difficult to believe it came from the same writer, and often seem a subtler adaptation of Hitchcock than anything managed by Brian De Palma.

De Palma springs inauspiciously to mind at the very start, as the camera prowls round the janitor's workplace, a labyrinth of pipes, gauges and the general below-the-ground paraphernalia of a modern office building, all positively oozing menace until a boiler suddenly ignites with a roar, as if to testify that this truly is the pit of hell. But, in old-fashioned humanist rather than new-fangled genre terms, what the janitor does proves less important than what he is. The supercharged menace of working in an empty building late at night is only alluded to long enough for it to do what in everybody's fantasy it should do: produce a body. To wit, that of Vietnamese diamond importer Mr Long, found by janitor Daryll Deever (William Hurt), who fears the killer may be his friend Aldo (James Woods), another janitor who was recently fired after an argument with Long. But being in the vicinity of a murder also has its positive side, in that it allows Daryll to meet newscaster Tony Sokolow (Sigourney Weaver), with whom he has fallen in love as a TV presence and whom he proceeds to lead on by hinting that he knows more about the slaying than he in fact does.

What Daryll is, or seems to be, at this point is a rather baffling mixture of how Tesich would like to write him and what the genre demands of him. Like the adolescents of *Breaking Away*, his background is low income and his ambitions limited—or non-existent, making him fairly unique as a hero (being a janitor is just his job, he is not hiding out from a



William Hurt and James Woods.

traumatic past or a terrible secret). At the same time, his meeting cute with Tony implies that his amiable fuzziness may just be a mask—as does his obsessiveness about preserving her TV appearances on his video recorder (a romantic idealism for the 80s). And Daryll proves he has the wit more requisite in a hero than a janitor when he teases Tony with a double-entendre speech, like the *Big Sleep* horse-racing duologue, which begins, 'Say, your floors need buffing or anything?' He also proves he can handle his motorbike like a charger when the time comes to rescue Tony from danger. This the script explains by giving him a distinguished service record in Vietnam, an apparently unproblematic experience since Daryll, romantic fixation notwithstanding, derives nothing from the movie cycle of embittered returning vets. Where it does become problematic is with the character of Aldo, discharged as a coward from Vietnam and enraged that Long and his criminal syndicate have now arrived to exploit the US, where he can't even find work.

But before it has even established Vietnam as an ideological cross-reference, the film is crossing it with others. Tony's family background, wealthy East European emigrants, is the opposite of Daryll's, and while he fiddles with his video recorder, the film cuts to another sequence of stealthy tracking, this time through the elegant Sokolow home where a musical recital is taking place. It is a fund-raising event for an organisation helping Jews to escape from the Soviet Union, an organisation run by Tony's fiancée, Israeli diplomat Joseph (Christopher Plummer). And not only is Tony about to be safely wedded to her class, but so it turns out is Daryll: he is engaged, unenthusiastically, to Aldo's

sister Linda (who works in a garment sweat-shop), while the excitable, evidently unhinged Aldo plans on opening a sporting-goods store with his future brother-in-law.

Family is the primary motif of *The Janitor*, and the way it is threatened and defined by these foreign adventures. Daryll's father bitterly ascribes the breakdown of his marriage to his having been crippled in war, and is contemptuous of Daryll for not claiming a disability pension from Vietnam. One of the two cops who tail Aldo throughout the film talks of his 'good son' who died in Vietnam, and deduces that, since whoever killed Long must be a hero, Aldo, by the evidence of his service record, can't be the culprit. When, towards the end, the second cop announces that he and his wife are thinking of adopting a child, the motif seems in danger of being overused. It is as if, on the alien and cosmopolitan turf of New York, Tesich must work out the concerns of his homogeneous Midwestern background with a schematic intensity.

The other danger is, as these patterns proliferate, that the plot itself will have nowhere to move. In a sense, the plot is something of a put-on anyway, with Daryll, a make-believe man who knows too much, being pursued throughout by both police and Long's associates, who are equally baffled. But the film maintains some tension by maintaining the tease of Daryll and Tony's relationship: he trying to convince her with puppyish declarations of love, while she, with the encouragement of her boss, holds out for his supposed 'scoop'. Worked in strictly as a plot motif, animals also do useful service. The horse Tony is riding when Daryll meets her in Central Park is a sign of social difference, but it also prepares the way for Daryll's climactic confrontation with the killer in the Claremont Riding Academy, making that scene less of a gratuitous set-piece. And Daryll keeps a dog that engages him in mock combat whenever he enters his apartment (like Inspector Clouseau's houseboy Cato), until the killer manages to doctor the dogfood.

Where Tesich and Yates have been most successful is in their playfulness: sketching surface patterns that hint at deeper psychological purposes. Beneath the tangle of family ties, darker loyalties lurk, most evidently in Daryll's guilty sense of responsibility for Aldo, and most enigmatically in the woman who hovers at Joseph's elbow even while he is courting Tony, and who is clearly the force behind his sense of mission, driving him to murder. As the zealots of the piece, Aldo and Joseph pass but do not meet, both having become voyeurs watching from the street when Daryll first takes Tony to his apartment, both betrayed at a social and personal level by their partners. The beauty of this pirouette (Joseph asks for a light, Aldo obliges then walks on) is that it not only looks but works like a Hitchcockian device, trumping De Palma as well as the anodyne assumptions of *Breaking Away*. □

BOOK REVIEWS

Camera Obscura

THE MAGICIAN AND THE CINEMA

by Erik Barnouw

Oxford University Press/£6.95

THE CAMERA OBSCURA, A CHRONICLE

by John H. Hammond

Adam Hilger, Bristol/£13.50

Erik Barnouw has had the pleasant and original idea of isolating the contribution of magicians to the early days of the cinema. Georges Méliès, the Isola Brothers, David Devant, Albert E. Smith and Stuart Blackton all began as magicians and became influential figures in the early movies. Even Griffith's cameraman Billy Bitzer, it seems, had an early career in magic. Others of the performers Barnouw considers cannot exactly be described as magicians: Félicien Trewey (who first brought the Lumière Cinématographe to London) was a shadowgrapher and Leopoldo Fregoli a protean comedian; but their inclusion is just allowable.

As their predecessors had employed the magic lantern to enrich their stage performances, the magicians of the 1890s used the cinematograph, and went on to teach it new tricks of their own. Mr Barnouw's central thesis is that 'the transfer to the screen of the magician's most sensational illusions ... proved ultimately catastrophic for magicians. Anyone with a camera and a splicer could produce the same miracles, and did. The sensations ceased to be sensational. Even on stage they began to seem stale. The magician found he had been helping to destroy his own profession.' The notion is overstated. Trick films may have gone out of fashion in time; but there is no real evidence that the magicians suffered (any more, at least, than any other sort of vaudeville performers) from the effect of the cinema. People like Devant, Houdini and Carl Hertz flourished to the end. Others like Smith and Blackton, the creators of Vitagraph, simply found movies more rewarding. Méliès was a different story; but his catastrophe had many causes, none of which was that magic was outmoded.

But Barnouw is so in love with his thesis that he will instance sadly, but perfectly untruthfully, how Maskelyne and Devant's St George's Hall became a cinema. As a historian he is sometimes rather casual about facts. Athanasius Kircher, he says, described the magic lantern 'in the 1646 edition of his book *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae*.' It was the 1671

edition; and a quarter of a century makes a difference. Vitagraph 'changed into Warner Brothers', which is a funny way of describing the absorption of the company. Describing early advertising films he mentions and illustrates a Méliès cigarette commercial without clarifying that it was made at the end of Méliès' life, in 1935. Houdini made *The Master Mystery* (whose poster provides the book's jolly dust jacket) 'in the 1910s'. The serial actually appeared in 1918-19; and I suspect it was not actually made 'for Pathé', though the company distributed it in France.

For such a small book it does seem quite sloppy. The mistakes and vagueness and questionable opinions ('the general public was scarcely aware of the magic lantern as such until ... the late decades of the nineteenth century') seem less serious than such an omission as failing to assess the role of Albert Hopkins' *Magic*, the most comprehensive of all manuals of magical effects, which appeared at the crucial date of 1897. Sadoul claimed that it transformed Méliès' aesthetic; Paul Hammond (*Marvellous Méliès*) dismissed this as an exaggeration. Even so, in its descriptions of illusions, of trick photography, of cinematographic apparatus and effects we can find the seed and inspiration of almost every experiment in movie magic in the late 1890s. Pace Paul Hammond, Hopkins' illustrations of a stage illusion *A Trip to the Moon* show undeniable resemblances to Méliès' lunar landscapes of five years later. Even though Barnouw lists the book in his bibliography, the fact that he includes a reproduction of one of Hopkins' pictures (a spirit photograph) in a debased copy, with only a Library of Congress acknowledgment, suggests he didn't get round actually to looking up the book.

John H. Hammond's *The Camera Obscura, A Chronicle* is in contrast a small book whose research and comprehensiveness can hardly be faulted. The camera obscura is the very heart of the cinema. The light-proof box and lens gave us both the photographic camera and, by reversal of its process, the magic lantern. It too, in the early days, seemed like magic. Mr Barnouw, in fact, quotes from Della Porta's description (getting his bibliography a bit wrong). Della Porta, an attractive sixteenth century *savant*, was himself charged with witchcraft. Mr Hammond illustrates (from Johann Zahn, 1685) a goblet incorporating a camera obscura so that scenes could be made to appear as if by magic on the surface of the wine within.

The camera obscura was rapidly and widely adopted as a 'philosophical instrument' and at least by the eighteenth century was a regular aid to the landscape artist. Mr Hammond conscientiously analyses the claims that

Vermeer and Canaletto both used the device; and follows its use up to the point at which nineteenth century scientists first experimented with means of fixing the camera image chemically, to avoid the painstaking necessity of tracing it by hand. It is fascinating to find the debate over the relative superiority of the camera image and the artist's vision long before photography. Canaletto spoke of the need to 'eliminate things offensive to the senses'; and Hogarth, for one, would have nothing to do with this mechanical reproduction of Nature.

Century by century Mr Hammond painstakingly records every known reference to the history or use of the camera obscura, as scientific tool or seaside show, from Roger Bacon to picture postcards of the camera obscura on Margate esplanade. He finds a reference in Marx and Engels' *German Ideology* and shows that a camera obscura was used by Wedgwood's artists for the pictures on the great 'frog' service made for Catherine the Great.

An essential contribution to the literature of cinema prehistory, the book is saved from being a mere fact-list by Mr Hammond's feeling for the quirky detail, like the benefits of the fashionable La Samaritaine camera obscura to the pickpockets of seventeenth century Paris; or the physical notability of James Bruce, an early artist-user, who was, said Fanny Burney, 'the tallest man you ever saw—at least gratis.' No one is perfect: even the excellent Mr Hammond nods slightly over the problems of the Della Porta bibliography. The 1589 edition of *Magia Naturalis* was not the second; and the translation of its arrangement in twenty 'books' does not mean that it comprised twenty volumes.

DAVID ROBINSON

National Monument

FOREVER EALING

by George Perry

Pavilion/£8.95

Forever Ealing carries the subtitle 'A Celebration of the Great British Film Studio'. Celebrations are certainly in order, especially at a time when the studio responsible for *Sing As We Go!*, *Went the Day Well?* and *Whisky Galore!*—to mention only those titles with punctuation marks—notches up fifty years of production. (Since 1956 the compact buildings at the southern edge of Ealing Green have been maintained by the BBC, almost with the respect due to a national monument.) But it would be far easier for readers to join in the junketing if the author, George

Perry, hadn't organised the celebration on such dutiful lines.

The bill of fare includes abundant illustrations (often pushing the text into a corner of the page) and a predominantly chronological survey of films produced on the Ealing site, principally by Sir Michael Balcon (from 1938 onwards), though the Basil Dean years and the silent days of pioneer Will Barker are briefly covered. Plot details and a filmography are provided; the pre-Balcon films have to be content with skeletal credits. Discussion of the films is cemented with apposite morsels of social history (such as Ivor Novello's wartime stay in Wormwood Scrubs for ration fiddling) and coverage of the British film industry's wayward progress (Government regulations, audience figures).

Viewed as an assemblage of basic data about the history of film-making at Ealing, George Perry's book has its distinct uses, though the data is sometimes conveyed in sentences resembling indigestible sandwiches, overgenerously stuffed with facts and dependent clauses. There are other drawbacks. The illustrations often crowd out the page numbers, and there is no guarantee that an elusive reference in the index will finally deliver the goods. After tracking down page 39, we find that Balcon's opening production at Ealing, *The Gaunt Stranger*, is described as 'one of those stories where virtually the entire cast is suspect until the real killer is unmasked. An unpretentious, averagely competent film ...' This is skating on the surface, and skating blindly. *The Gaunt Stranger*, an Edgar Wallace thriller hastily conceived to start Balcon off as an independent producer, may be no world-shaker, but the Germanic style of sets and photography, and the script's perky wit, deserve some acknowledgment.

It may be considered unfair to belabour the author for not providing much of a critical tool: unlike Charles Barr's seminal *Ealing Studios of 1977*, *Forever Ealing* makes no attempt to penetrate the warp and woof of Ealing films and their relationship to British sensibilities and culture. For the most part Perry's observations are like his view of *The Gaunt Stranger*: unpretentious and averagely competent, barring a few hyperboles and curt dismissals (*The Ladykillers* is needlessly described as 'almost surreal ... a decade ahead of its time', while Alexander Mackendrick's later work in the 60s is conversely cast off as 'unexceptional'). The trouble is that averagely competent criticism of Ealing films, indeed the bulk of British cinema, doesn't take us very far, and certainly doesn't help us climb the wall of bland nostalgia that time and memory have constructed round them. Perry is not blinkered; he knows when films are

weak and dated, but he rarely puts this knowledge to good effect. It is easy enough, for instance, to pigeonhole the characters of *The Blue Lamp* as stereotypes or to castigate the dialogue for showing the fatal marks of 'Huggetry' (Richard Winnington's coinage). But it is far more essential to get inside the stereotypes and vocal cadences, to see why they have such a tenacious, debilitating hold on British films and audiences.

Perry's view of Ealing as an institution, and Balcon as a producer, hardly moves beyond the familiar picture of communal endeavour under a paternal head of production; the real frustrations this régime engendered (alongside the undoubted achievements) scarcely emerge at all. On a simple level *Forever Ealing* amply fulfils its celebratory aim. The films are recalled, often fondly; there are full-page shots of luminaries like Googie Withers and Mervyn Johns; the fly-leaves contain a panorama of Ealing's distinctive posters. But the sum total of the celebration somehow blankets, rather than illuminates, the subject.

GEOFF BROWN

Scotsman

GRIERSON ON THE MOVIES

edited by Forsyth Hardy
Faber and Faber/£7.25

'In my time I have seen critics in the other media miss by a mile. I saw some highly respected gents miss by a mile on Joyce and even on Eliot, as others were mournfully struggling to get in the good word for Cézanne. For that matter, *Long Day's Journey into Night* was separating the men from the boys not so long ago. Maybe the cinema was easier; but we lived on "firsts" and I don't think missed any ...'

The tone of voice of John Grierson in full cry is unmistakable. This particular quotation is from a late (1968) essay, which Forsyth Hardy uses to lead off his collection of Grierson's pieces on movies, or films other than documentaries. By then, Grierson had hardened into the role of seer, pundit, international eminence and professional Scot. In old age, he was forcing the tone. What was lost 'in the illusion that we were all boys together in the good old first division of dramatic criticism,' he says later in the same essay, 'was the original sense of pioneering a new medium, the original warm sense of having been one-and-all together on the ships at Mylae.' That sort of sentence needs to be read in a broad Scots accent. But the old romantic was also an old realist: 'When that night mail crossed the border

it was on a sort of last journey.'

The Grierson of thirty or forty years earlier was sharper, but rather more relaxed. And, of course, extremely influential. Those of us who began writing about films in 1950 or thereabouts can hardly have failed to absorb, probably at second or third hand, a great deal of Griersonian doctrine—some of which, no doubt, still clings. Cinema, he of course argued, should be an art of social (or socialist) purpose, in pursuit of large ideas. Film-makers were goaded to expand their horizons. Flaherty, Chaplin and Eisenstein were among the heroes, though his writing on them stops well this side of idolatry. His preferred cinema was masculine, and an early objection to the talkies was that they would encourage a cinema of idle chit-chat for 'the women audiences who hang like a millstone round the aesthetic neck of democracy.' An opinion only possibly modified by 1968, in a double-edged tribute to women critics: 'Now that the fashion in story-lines goes for the various deviations in domestic and personal derangement, it may be best to leave women to deal with it.'

Grierson insisted on active, or activist criticism. 'We promoted the Western to the notion of epic; we got the cinema closer to the social democratic actuality of American life,' he proclaimed, though leaving the boast for criticism rather unargued. But away from the claims for 'firsts' and 'first divisions', he also made those devastating comments which everyone knows and which here can be placed in context. The verdict on Sternberg, that 'when a director dies he becomes a photographer' comes in his piece on *Shanghai Express*. Sternberg, he said even more witheringly, had become 'the sophisticated purveyor of the meretricious Dietrich' and had 'the little warm thankful hand of Adolph Zukor for his pains.' (Earlier, Grierson had managed the feat of reviewing *The Blue Angel* without mentioning the meretricious Dietrich at all.) He was severe about Lang, noting that 'it is remarkable that Fritz Lang's instinct runs to bigger ideas than any other director; it is just as remarkable how little he ever makes of them.' He suggested that Eisenstein, after meeting Sternberg and Stroheim in Hollywood, 'wished that he also had the nerve to assume a "von".' And his view of Hitchcock, as early as *Murder* (1930), as 'no more than the world's best director of unimportant pictures', was received opinion for a generation.

In the same review, Grierson said of Hitchcock that he was 'the only English director who can put the English poor on the screen with any verisimilitude' (interesting, and possibly true), but that 'he finds it more a matter of regret that they have no dinner jackets than that they have no



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dinners.' His views on British films and film-makers of the 30s add up to the book's most interesting section: scorn for *Cavalcade*; dislike for *Tell England* ('I would as quickly put it on the tumbrel as any film I ever saw'); uncertainty about the brilliance of Laughton ('the greatest sabotage a film could have'); optimism about the future of Michael Powell, as early as 1931 and on the strength of a forgotten second feature called *Rynox*. And here, in 1938, is Grierson making the perennial plea for modesty, indigenous virtue and a sense of scale in British films, and proclaiming that 'there is no great mystery about the future of British film, only the mystery of really wanting it, really working for it.'

There is also a fine anecdote about the first London screening of *Potemkin*. Grierson had laid on the show for an audience of dignitaries, who turned out to be more taken with the spectacle than he had bargained for. 'The first man to make a practical suggestion about it was Rudyard Kipling: "These Russians," he said, "are doing all over again what we do so splendidly in our own country. They are making tattoos, and what we ought to be doing ourselves is making tattoos in film form."' Only the conjunction of Eisenstein, Kipling and Grierson could have produced the view of *Potemkin* as a Soviet answer to the Royal Tournament.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

LETTERS

So Alone

SIR,—I read with fascination and amusement the article in 'Double Takes' (Autumn 1981) about John Ford's alleged film *So Alone*. Perhaps you would be interested in the real story.

In July 1957, a short-lived magazine called *Film Journal*, produced in Melbourne (Australia), published an article about a 'new British Film Institute film' written by one Jarvis Barcarolle. The real author was the noted film biographer Charles Higham.

The purpose of the article was to satirise the then fashionable school of 'committed' criticism, as represented especially by Lindsay Anderson in his SIGHT AND SOUND article 'Stand Up! Stand Up!'. The patent absurdity that John Ford would have made an 8-minute film for the BFI suited the satiric purpose of the article, and was the only reason his name was used at all.

I'm sure that Charles would not have expected anyone to take the article seriously, and it was amusing for those of us familiar with the background to see the non-existent film appear (complete with release date!) in the filmography in Peter Bogdanovich's book. But to read scholarly reviews of the film, and even see the implication that Ford himself may have cooked the story up, is to make one wonder what other fanciful rubbish passes as film study. 'When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.'

Yours faithfully,
RICHARD KEYS
McMahon's Point, Sydney.

Anderson's Ford

SIR,—May I correct an inaccuracy in the allusion to the epigraph of *About John Ford* in Tom Milne's review? Henri Frédéric Amiel was not a 'comparatively obscure' French playwright. He was born in Geneva in 1821, a Swiss-French intellectual and litterateur, whose most memorable work was a 'Journal Intime'. (He published poems, of no great note.) The *Journal* appeared posthumously, and rapidly achieved European celebrity. It was translated into

English by Mrs Humphrey Ward. Robert Bridges included a number of passages from it in his anthology *The Spirit of Man*.

It is true there are passages in *About John Ford* which are avowedly polemic. I tried to give these the forcefulness appropriate to the hero of my book. I offered specific criticisms of Messrs Sarris, Wollen, Baxter and Ms Place, not for the pleasure of 'berating' them, but because I believe they falsify and mislead. My object, in short, was to affirm the essentially moral impulse which inspires Ford's work, and which gives it meaning and value. No review that I have seen (including Mr Milne's) really argues this point, for or against.

To return to Amiel. It is sad that his *Journal* is now, as far as I know, out of print and forgotten. He said some very wise and very relevant things. Here is another passage, in Mrs Ward's translation: '... Moral indifference is the malady of the cultivated classes. The modern separation of enlightenment and virtue, of thought and conscience, of the intellectual aristocracy from the honest and vulgar crowd, is the greatest danger that can threaten liberty... our cynics and railers are mere egotists, who stand aloof from the common duty and in their indolent remoteness are of no service to society against any ill which may attack it. Their cultivation consists in having got rid of feeling. And thus they fall farther and farther away from true humanity, and approach nearer to the demoniacal nature. What was it that Mephistopheles lacked? Not intelligence, certainly, but goodness.'

Amiel wrote that on 26 October 1870.

Yours faithfully,
LINDSAY ANDERSON
London N.W.6.

Kinetoscope

SIR,—Quincannon's column 'Double Takes' in the Summer issue discusses literary works that have a claim to being the first to treat cinema as subject. He lists one that appeared as early as

1898. While acknowledging that pursuit of historical firsts is the scholarly equivalent of chasing rainbows, I find Brander Matthews' 'The Kinetoscope of Time' in *Scribners Magazine* of December 1895 worthy of serious consideration for its early vision.

In this short story, the narrator discovers himself in an over-draped kinetoscope parlour where he peeks into machines that reveal dramatic scenes from history and literature 'like life itself in form and in colour and in motion.' The mysterious master of the parlour later invites him to look into a machine that reveals the narrator's own future. The narrator refuses and escapes into the city street filled with only mundane mechanical marvels. Passing a shop window, he sees an old portrait which he recognises as that of the man who ran the parlour. Appropriately for a tale of Faustian temptation, the master of the diabolical devices is that 18th century trickster Count Cagliostro.

Could all this be yet another brief for the much disputed title of inventor of the cinema?

Yours faithfully,
J L ANDERSON
Brookline, Massachusetts.

Paul Rotha

SIR,—We are currently working on a book about Paul Rotha, the British documentary film maker and theorist. We are also holding

a retrospective of Rotha's films at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, starting in January 1982. We hope that this will be accompanied by an exhibition of stills and archive material.

If any of your readers have anything to contribute—photographs, letters, memories or anything else of relevance—we would be most grateful if they would get in touch with us as soon as possible at the Oxford Film Makers Workshop, The Stables, North Place, Headington, Oxford OX3 9HY.

Yours faithfully,
LYNNE FREDLUND
Oxford.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

DAVID BADDER is one of the editors of *Film Dope* and is currently working in Portugal... ROBERT BROWN is a film editor at the BBC and reviewer for the *Monthly Film Bulletin*... ROSS CARE has written on the cinema for *Film Quarterly*, *Millimeter*, *Take One*... MICHAEL CIMENT is Associate Professor of American Studies at the University of Paris and a member of the editorial board of *Positif*. His recent book on Stanley Kubrick will be published in Britain... NICK RODDICK is a freelance writer who contributes regularly to the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *Los Angeles Times*. He is working on a study of Warner Brothers in the 30s.

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FRAMEWORK FILMS for *The Other One*.
BOYD'S COMPANY for *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*.
CINEMATOGRAFICA JUNE 23 for *Tales of Ordinary Madness*.
LES FILMS DU LOSANGE for *Le Pont du Nord*.
LOS CAPITANES for *Tres Tristes Tigres*.
VO FILMES for *The Territory*, *Francisca*, *Aspern*.
THE OTHER CINEMA for *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter*.
TECHNISONOR for *La Naissance du Jour*.
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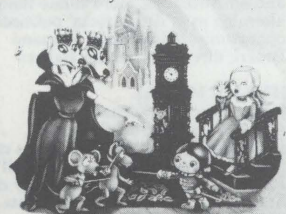
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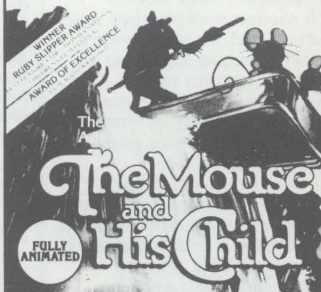
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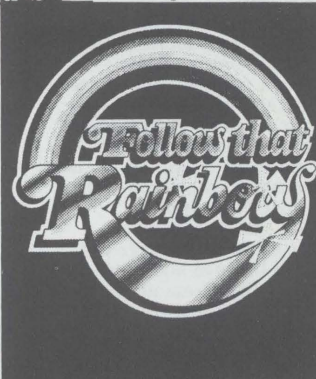
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ON NOW

● THE CALIFORNIA DOLLS (CIC)

Set in the US women's wrestling circuit, *The California Dolls* (retitled from ... *All the Marbles*) must have one of the most unprepossessing subjects of recent years. But what happens in the various arenas (handled unprudently and engagingly enough) is less significant than the travelling in between. This is a road movie for the 80s, in which manager Peter Falk and his two 'California Dolls' scrape a precarious living touring industrial halls in the wintry Midwest. The complaints of Pagliacci, bemoaning the entertainer's lot, provide soundtrack accompaniment, and Robert Aldrich seems to imply that much the same might be said about a film-maker touting his wares in hard times. A strain of self-consciousness—the threesome finally have their day of show-biz glory—in fact plays alongside some Aldrichian rites of humiliation (mud-wrestling) leading to self-vindication. That it is nothing less than down-market Clifford Odets is acknowledged by a wisecracking Falk. (Vicki Frederick, Laurene Landon, Richard Jaeckel.)

● GALLIPOLI (CIC)

The comfortable upholstery of Peter Weir's attempted epic—handsome scope camerawork, expansively detailed set-pieces—ends by getting in the way of any real historical illumination. The first half sketches, via an anecdote about friends joining up from different sides of the tracks, an impression of 'home front' Australian society which, despite incidental felicities, comes over as too evasive and sentimental to have any emblematic point. The middle is devoted to some tediously comic displays of mateship during training in Egypt (with some Pommy officers putting in a parodic appearance of self-defeating obviousness). When the film moves to Gallipoli itself, an undeniably impressive feat of reconstruction, the tactical details are not always conveyed clearly enough to prevent confusion creeping in. The climactic scenes of carnage can hardly fail to leave audiences aghast, but they seem ultimately to exist in a vacuum. (Mark Lee, Mel Gibson, Bill Kerr.)

● TWO STAGE SISTERS (BFI)

Xie Jin's remarkable film traces the parallel destinies of two actresses, whose art and friendship are threatened by the interlinked evils of fame and political repression in 40s China. What is most striking is how the conventions and ingredients of a

full-blooded Western melodrama (the emphasis on female experience, the corrupting influence of the city, the theatrical background) are subjected to a rigorously dialectical treatment. As a result, the possible schematism and easy moral judgments of the good/bad sisters' narrative are avoided in favour of some shifting oppositions which are finally transcended via revolution rather than romantic love. The ending was supposedly imposed from above but cannot be divorced (though most British critics tried to) from the obvious pleasures of the expressive *mise en scène*, the camera style (witness the extraordinary opening crane shot) and the performances. A great discovery. (Xie Fang, Cao Yindi, Feng Ji.)

ARTHUR (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Unwise attempt by writer-director Steve Gordon to build a whole comedy round the character of a lovable drunken layabout (Dudley Moore). John Gielgud casts effectively withering glances as his butler, but Liza Minnelli just withers in a fuzzily written supporting role. (Jill Eikenberry.)

BACK ROADS (Rank)

On the run from the police and a hostile world, two indomitable losers—sad little hooker and cheery ex-boxer—find a kind of loving on the road. Smugly sentimental sequel to the successful formula of *Norma Rae* for Martin Ritt and Sally Field. (Tommy Lee Jones.)

BLOW OUT (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Movie soundman John Travolta accidentally tapes a political murder and, under Brian De Palma's faintly constrained direction, a mystery of meaningful correspondences unspools. A Big Theme, which remains steadfastly generalised, rather stifles the cinematic zip that is usually De Palma's forte. (Nancy Allen.)

BODY HEAT (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

This latest film noir update takes *Double Indemnity*'s adultery into murder plot and turns up the heat, both literally (a steamy Florida setting) and sexually (plenty of pure, graphic lust). Misogyny still rules, although writer-director Lawrence Kasdan has William Hurt engineer his own destruction. However, an undeniably seductive package. (Kathleen Turner; Richard Crenna.)

CARBON COPY (ITC)

A script by Stanley Shapiro makes sharper comedy than one would expect out of this dated satire on integration, in which successful executive George Segal (himself not quite the full WASP ticket) is undone by the revelation that he is the father of a black teenager. Michael Schultz directs imperceptibly. (Susan Saint James, Jack Warden.)

CEDDO (BFI)

Impressive Senegalese film which subjects the history of Africa to the theatrical stylisation of an Elizabethan play: three symbolic foreigners, three challenging princes, Africa itself as the stage. The message, alas, is all too familiar as colonial oppression yields to national pride. (Director, Ousmane Sembene.)

THE CONDUCTOR (Cinegate)

Wajda's decidedly uncertain moral story (1979) about an expatriate Polish conductor (John Gielgud, dubbed) who returns home in pursuit of a youthful dream: some nice observations about bureaucracy in pursuit of prestige propaganda points, but on the whole a pale shadow of the *Man* films. (Krystyna Janda, Andrzej Seweryn.)

CONTINENTAL DIVIDE (CIC)

Flat-footed romantic comedy, with John Belushi essaying a change of image as a muck-raking city journalist reluctantly falling for the wide open spaces and a lady conservationist. The slapstick lingers on. (Blair Brown; director, Michael Apted.)

CROSS AND PASSION (BFI)

The chief virtue of this scrappily made documentary is the witness it bears to the appalling conditions of normal life on the Roman Catholic Turf Lodge estate in West Belfast. It offers no answers, but poses, once again, some of the old intractable questions. (Directors, Claire Pollak, Kim Longinotto.)

EYE OF THE NEEDLE (United Artists)

Fairly conventional wartime best-seller stuff about an escaping Nazi agent who meets his match on a remote Scottish island, but handled by Richard Marquand (now promoted to the next *Star Wars* instalment) with an engaging, sometimes Lesterlike, flair for narrative refinement and telling incidental effect. (Donald Sutherland, Kate Nelligan, Ian Bannen.)

THE FINAL CONFLICT (Fox)

The hitherto interesting *Omen* series ends in rout and confusion, not just for the Devil's forces but for a script that is encumbered with po-faced religiosity and an Antichrist more comic than alarming as a 'dirty tricks' political opportunist. (Sam Neill, Rossano Brazzi; director, Graham Baker.)

HEAVY METAL (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

A jerkily episodic sci-fi cartoon, supposedly about the dire effects of a pulsating jewel, 'the sum of all evil'. Plenty of green blood, unsuitably clad Amazons and bogus deep thoughts. (Director, Gerald Potterton.)

IMPROPER CHANNELS (Rank)

Modestly likeable Canadian comedy with Alan Arkin and Mariette Hartley as a separated couple trying to wrest their son from the fierce clutches of Social Services. Uninspired direction (Eric Till) and some unrestrained hamming torpedo the material's potential. (Monica Parker.)

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ROSIE THE RIVETER (The Other Cinema)

Delightful feminist documentary, using interviews and contemporary newsreel footage to expose the gap between truth and propaganda in the legend of how America's 'housewives' kept the assembly lines going during World War Two. Very informative and very funny. (Director, Connie Field.)

LIGHT YEARS AWAY (Artificial Eye)

Alain Tanner working in Ireland and the English tongue, some distance from his best form, though there is still much to marvel at in the story of Jonas in the year 2000 (played with layabout energy by Mick Ford) being educated in the ways of the world by a gruff hermit (Trevor Howard, to the manner born). As a magical mystery tour of the wonders and pains of existence the film is perfectly viable, but the philosophy suffers when the fantasy becomes literally airborne towards the end.

LILI MARLEEN (Alpha)

Fulsomely romantic bio-pic telling the supposedly true story behind the song that became the forces' favourite during World War Two. Possibly intended as one of Fassbinder's Sirkian exercises, but emerging as silly, sluggish and tawdry. (Hanna Schygulla, Giancarlo Giannini, Mel Ferrer.)

LOVING COUPLES (Rank)

Nought out of ten for originality, and scarcely any more for Jack Smight's

direction, but the females (Susan Sarandon, Shirley MacLaine) score a few welcome points in this timidly permissive return to the Ross Hunter school of comedy. (James Coburn, Sally Kellerman.)

MOMMIE DEAREST (CIC)

New Hollywood resuscitates Old Hollywood in a ghastly farce transformed into a *tour de force* of comic bad taste by clichéd script, dripping opulence, and Faye Dunaway's magnificently over-the-top reincarnation of Joan Crawford. Possibly the campest film of 1981. (Diana Scarwid, Steve Forrest; director, Frank Perry.)

MONTENEGRO (New Realm)

Stifling in Swedish suburbia, an American-born housewife finds liberation for the libido at the Zanzi Bar, haunt of unwashed, uninhibited immigrant workers. Engagingly dotty, but like Borowczyk, Dusan Makavejev seems to have painted himself into a sexual impasse. (Susan Anspach, Erland Josephson, Per Oscarsson.)

OUT OF THE BLUE (Cinegate)

50s melodrama is both dynamically revisited and critically revised in Dennis Hopper's extraordinary, wholly unfacile, Canadian-made movie, with Hopper as the suddenly downbeat extension of an erstwhile free spirit and Linda Manz as his abused punk daughter at whose hands he (though not alone) receives a deliciously Freudian comeuppance. (Sharon Farrell, Raymond Burr.)

PATERNITY (CIC)

A sexual business deal (Burt Reynolds wants a baby and pays Beverly D'Angelo for the use of her body) triggers an uninspired, old-fashioned comedy romance in which the spectator waits (impatiently for the couple to realise it's true love. Another waste of Reynolds' comic talents. (Director, David Steinberg.)

PRIEST OF LOVE (Enterprise)

Carrying on his role as the cinema's champion of D. H. Lawrence, Christopher Miles turns on the author himself, and mires him in just the kind of prettified, overstuffed period recreation that he would have found anathema. Matters of scandal, rather than literature, hold centre stage. (Ian McKellen, Janet Suzman, Ava Gardner.)

RETURN OF THE SECAUCUS SEVEN (Osiris)

Novelist and New World screenwriter John Sayles' first film as director: a humorous, naturalistically observed study of a group of 60s protesters, gathered for an annual reunion weekend. Sayles' obvious affection for his characters is thankfully matched by a more cynical attitude towards the ways they are coping with the 80s. (Bruce MacDonald, Karen Trott, John Sayles.)

RICH AND FAMOUS (CIC)

Little more than a showcase for its two female stars, oscillating uneasily between 50s sentiment and 80s permissiveness. The central female friendship becomes increasingly difficult to sustain, and the film's interest shifts, predictably, to the various relationships with men. Undemanding and easy on the eye, it somehow misses the point. (Jacqueline Bisset, Candice Bergen; director, George Kukor.)

WOLFEN (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

The something sinister and hairy that is terrorising New York turns out to be a compound of 60s mind-blown sentiment and 80s eye-boggling technology. The excuse, again, for graphic butchery is ecology, though the notion that the horror film is being dignified in the process deserves shorter shrift than the victims. (Albert Finney, Diane Venora; director, Michael Wadleigh.)

THE NATIONAL FILM SCHOOL

‘When I served on the jury to choose the Short Film of the Year for the annual Grierson Award I was struck not only by the large number from the National Film School—eight out of the sixteen finalists—but by their astoundingly high technical standards. Unwilling to separate the final two we gave awards to both Paul Bamborough’s *The Tom Machine* and Jerzy Kaszubowski’s *Josef*.’
Chris Dunkley,
Financial Times.

‘Exactly ten years ago, Nicholas Broomfield and Bill Forsyth were two of the National Film School’s first intake of students. Now three of their films have opened in London to considerable critical acclaim—Broomfield’s *Soldier Girls* (made with his regular partner Joan Churchill) and Forsyth’s *That Sinking Feeling* and *Gregory’s Girl*.’
Derek Malcolm,
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